

OBJECTS OF DELIGHT

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An investigation of miniaturisation focusing on
nineteenth century mass-produced miniature objects in
working class contexts.

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ABSTRACT

Multum in parvo

From the late eighteenth century onwards, people of limited means in industrialising countries were likely to spend a proportion of their disposable income on “useless” non-utilitarian decorative objects. Miniature representations of a wide range of real or imaginary originals, many of these were displayed in the domestic context on mantelpieces. To fill a gap in both archaeological and historical research into the recent past, this study examines the importance of miniaturisation and what these small-scale objects can tell us about everyday life in the nineteenth century. My research reveals that the panoply of figures on the mantelpiece would often include plaster of Paris “images,” a class of decorative miniature three-dimensional object that, because of its low value and fragility, has not generally survived in the present. By archaeologically “excavating” a contemporary record of a mid-nineteenth-century mantelpiece and identifying and interrogating the artefacts on it, I explore for the first time the complex global network of creativity, trade and consumption with which these objects link, and which demonstrates the knowledge, intellectual lives, tastes and interests of those who desired and delighted in them.

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Preamble

“A chimney-piece in Plumtree-court, Holborn”



Figure 1: A Chimney-piece in Plumtree Court, Holborn (Godwin 1856, 306).

Late in the evening of November 24th 2014 I was browsing a mid-nineteenth-century edition of *The Builder*, a magazine edited and mostly written by architect and activist George Godwin, when I came across an illustration captioned “A Chimney-piece in Plumtree-court, Holborn” (Figure 1).¹

¹ George Godwin (1813-1888) was a Kensington-based architect and writer who edited *The Builder* between 1844 and 1883. The publication – “An illustrated weekly magazine for the architect, engineer, constructor, sanitary reformer, and art lover” – has been described as “the foremost architectural and building periodical of the nineteenth century” (London Metropolitan Archives 1997/2009). Godwin wrote about Plumtree Court while he was District Surveyor for South Islington (1853-1874) and later presented evidence to the 1884 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes that led to the 1885 Housing of the Working Classes Act.

In the accompanying text, Godwin explains why he included this illustration:

Let us in a parenthesis, by way of relief from the unpleasantness of the details we are forced to go into, here refer to the love of "art" which is often exhibited in the most miserable quarters, in the shape of plaster casts and little prints, not of very refined character, it is true, but still agreeable and cheering as evidence of a striving upwards. The painted parrots and spotted cats, and red-and-blue varnished prints, which not many years ago decorated homes of greater pretence, have found a resting-place lower down in the social scale. Our sketch of an actual chimney-piece will serve as a record of some well-known barbaric favourites. Art offers itself as a social bridge of no ordinary size and strength

(Godwin 1856, 305)

The "unpleasantness" to which Godwin refers was his experience of the living conditions of the "poor," about whose "miserable quarters" he was writing in an attempt to draw attention to their overcrowding and lack of sanitation.

Up to this point in my research I had not come across a single nineteenth-century *record*, other than incidental and distant details in a few paintings and drawings, of identifiable miniature objects situated in the domestic interior of an unpretentious nineteenth-century home. This sketch, which was subsequently republished in Godwin's book *Town swamps and social bridges* (Godwin 1859, 18-19) therefore provides a rare and extremely valuable account of a class of material culture – mantelpiece ornaments – in a context devoid of any creative, and possibly misleading, artistic licence. Here was an example of something special, because, as

archaeologist Mark Leone noted, “artifact clusters virtually never appear the way anyone would have written about them” (Leone 1992, 131). Here was a group of artefacts linked by location and time that someone *had* written about in a thoughtful and thought-provoking manner and which was more than a simple description.

Photography was in its infancy, and techniques for capturing images of dimly-lit interiors had yet to develop. It was also unlikely that any photographer at the time would bother with such a prosaic mantelpiece, although as this research reveals below (see for example pages 147 and 148), later investigative photography would sometimes include tantalising glimpses of ornaments.

The mantelpiece was recorded in a context on which this research concentrates – the lives of “people from below” non-elites, “ordinary people.”²

The objects placed on the mantelpiece include a couple of utilitarian things – a clay pipe and a candlestick. There’s something that could be a small cup or mug as well as an unidentifiable flattened oval object that might have been a “tinder box.”³

What really excited me, however, were the nine objects that could be regarded as “miniatures” – three cats, two bowls of fruit, an urn, a parrot and two difficult-to-identify female figures.

² For the challenges and importance of defining this focus, see below, page 69.

³ Tinder boxes were small wooden or metal containers within which were kept flint and steel (to strike a spark) and/or matches and dry inflammable material. They were used to light fires.

The love of art



Figure 2: Cat, probably plaster of Paris, with patches of colour and painted whiskers, detail from the illustration *A Chimney-piece in Plumtree Court, Holborn* (Godwin 1856, 306).

Figure 3: Plaster of Paris cat, dated 1850s, Södervika, Sweden (Jansson 2011).

<http://berntja.bloggo.nu/145--Ful-katt-med-affektionsvarde/>

As I began to investigate these objects I became convinced that as a group they should form the nucleus of my research. The identification of one object in particular, the seated cat near the centre of the mantelpiece (Figure 2), when compared with similarly-dated examples (e.g. Figure 3), led me to realise that the “actual chimney-piece” in Plumtree Court was part of a network of material culture that not only spread across the industrialising world and would tell me much about the lives of nineteenth century working people, but also entangled me, my experiences and practices. Given its context in a grim Holborn alley and mid-century society, Godwin’s text was also enlightening, with its discovery of “the love of art,”

its tongue-in-cheek horror of “barbaric favourites” and its suggestions of “cheering,” of “striving upwards” and “social bridges.” My research, then, has been directed and informed by that chimney-piece, the objects on it and Godwin’s description of it and its surroundings.

Filling a gap

The eclectic motifs of figurines and ornamental household goods were highly prized by consumers across a social and economic spectrum spanning the Atlantic World, yet they have been largely ignored by archaeologists

(Mullins and Jeffries 2012)

Paul Mullins’ and Nigel Jeffries’ realisation that these once “highly prized” objects had been overlooked by archaeologists, and, I would add, historians and others researching the material culture of the recent past, confirms that there is a gap to be filled. To many historians, archaeologists and writers the nineteenth-century, “working classes” were “unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet,” as E.M. Forster wrote in *Howards End* (Forster 1910, 47). Indeed, Leonard Bast, Forster’s working-class anti-hero, could be an example of someone “striving upward,” though, in a comment on material relevant to my research, Bast was hampered by his “scurf of books and china ornaments” (Ibid, 254). Books play a minor part in this work, but ornaments, through their tangible and virtual presence and their as actors on the stage that was the mantelpiece are its stars. It is on their performances, together with those who provided stories, characters, props and audiences, that my research focuses.

Curtain up on the mantelpiece

Throughout this study, it is worth bearing in mind that the nineteenth century took place in colour. Godwin’s sketch was in black and white of course. I have ventured to “colourise” it, based on what I have learned through my research. Figure 4 shows the result:

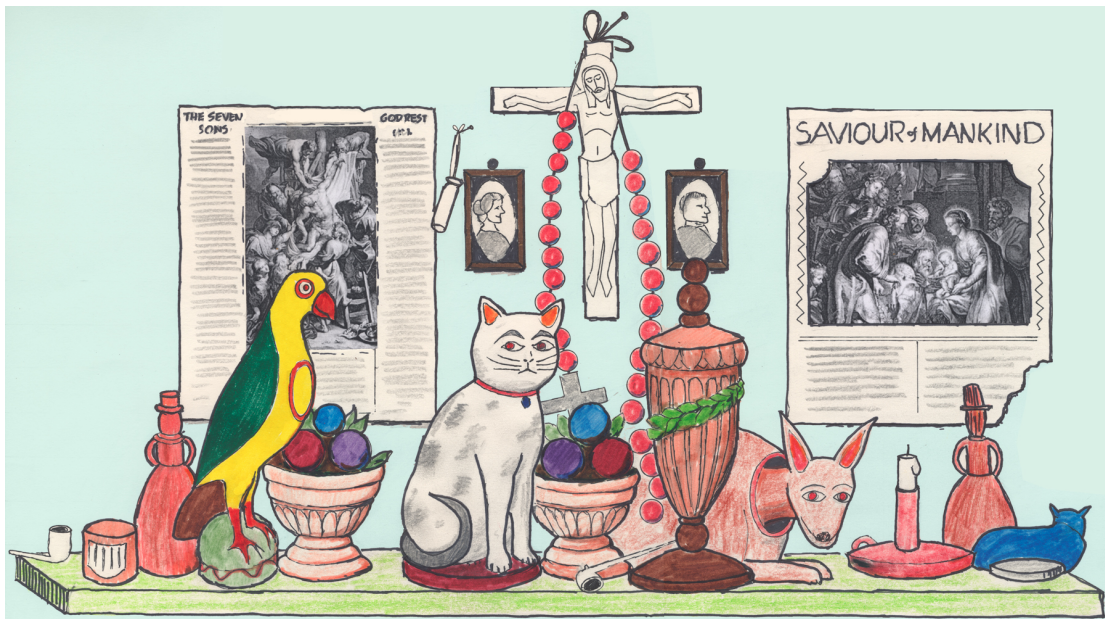


Figure 4: A simplified and coloured sketch of the Plumtree Court mantelpiece.

For a discussion of the decorative objects on the mantelpiece – Godwin’s “barbaric favourites” – see Section 8, page 228.

Presentation: how this document is laid out

Reflecting my practice:

After the introduction to my topic and how I approached it, in Section 1, my thesis is bracketed by two groups of narratives that reflect my practice as a writer. I begin in Section 2 by narrating and exploring a number of personal “encounters” with miniature things that demonstrate the significance of these objects in my life and, by extension, what they can mean in the lives of others. I end in Section 13 by creating two “tales” in an attempt to breathe life into my results.

Background:

In Section 3, I present the background to my research. I look briefly at the ancestry of miniature things and the importance of vision in our understanding of the miniature. I then introduce my archaeological approach and define my principal terms. Next I discuss the meaning of “image” as used in the nineteenth century, before discussing relevant past work and literature, mostly relating to material culture and how it can be applied to miniaturisation. In Section 4 I describe my methodologies.

Archaeology:

Focusing on a single “archaeological site” – a nineteenth century mantelpiece – I first discuss its wider nineteenth-century context in Section 5, before exploring its location in mid-century London in Section 6. I then research the source of the objects on the mantelpiece in Section 7. “Excavating” the mantelpiece in Section 8, I investigate in detail each artefact I discover. I describe how even ballads are relevant to this study of material culture in Section 9.

Analysis, discussion and conclusions:

I analyse and discuss in detail the significant implications of the results of my “excavation” in Section 10. I use this to explore the concept of “object Worlds” in Section 11 and in Section 12 I present my conclusions.

Appendices:

My three appendices, presented separately in Part Two, contain collected and anthologised source material that can be used in conjunction with the text or can be browsed independently.

Appendix I:

The first appendix is an annotated gallery of some 120 illustrations presented in roughly chronological order.

Appendix II:

The second appendix is an anthology of more than 250 texts extracted from contemporary sources, mostly newspapers and magazines, but also some books.

Appendix III:

I have summarised a number of nineteenth-century Old Bailey proceedings to demonstrate that much can be learned from the materiality of the crimes they record.

At various points through the text, paragraphs are highlighted with a grey background. These are intended to indicate and stress summaries of preceding sections, key points, interim conclusions or the arrival at a particular realisation.

NOTE

While most of this dissertation is presented as conventional printed text, reference is made to three music files. At the time of submission (2016), these could be accessed online (at <http://www.ralphmills.com/PhD.html>), but as web sites are notoriously ephemeral and technologies change, they have also been included as files saved on an optical disc in the hope that if this work is accessed in the dim and distant future, some technology will still exist that would enable this, by then ancient, medium to be seen and heard.

The research question

What can the phenomenon of miniaturisation, as reflected by the global trade and consumption of mass-produced miniature decorative objects, reveal about the nineteenth century working-class people who delighted in, desired, acquired, displayed, collected and discarded them?

Using evidence provided by historical archaeology, contemporary accounts in newspapers and other popular publications together with artworks and illustrations, what can be learned about miniaturisation from the fact that mass-produced miniatures are linked not only by the phenomenon of miniaturisation itself, but also by their presence and agency in macro-contexts (e.g. working-class homes), micro-contexts (e.g. the parlour mantelpiece), typologies (e.g. figurines, dolls), themes (e.g. pastoralism, patriotism), associations (e.g. doll parts and miniature food vessels), behaviours, (e.g. display, collection) and intrinsic and extrinsic meanings?

1: Introduction

When you make things small, special things happen

(Bailey 2013)

In this work I shed new light on the phenomenon of *miniaturisation*

Decorative miniature objects played increasing roles in the lives of people from the late eighteenth century onwards. My study locates and examines these ornamental miniatures, important examples of mass-produced “bric-à-brac,” in the homes of nineteenth-century “industrious classes,” in order to learn what “special things” happened there and what these objects might reveal about people who lived in those contexts.

Mass-produced miniatures, small-scale three-dimensional representations of full-sized, real and imagined, objects, were manufactured in large numbers in workshops and factories as minor products of the ‘industrial revolution.’⁴ Despite their popularity at the time, they were referred to only occasionally by nineteenth-century commentators, and mentioned rarely in contemporary fiction and non-fiction. A few can be identified in paintings, engravings and photographs of unpretentious domestic interiors. Some have been discovered on archaeological sites around the industrialised world, while others survived to become familiar

⁴ “Miniatures” also can refer to small-scale works of art, often commissioned portraits, that were popular from the sixteenth century until the rise of photography. They were usually the property of elites, and do not form part of this study.

today as highly-valued, curated ‘antiques’ or ‘collectibles.’ Those that were less robust or less valued have, it seems, been “forgotten.” Rarely highly regarded at the time by arbiters of taste, and equally rarely appreciated since by historians and archaeologists, mass-produced miniature objects are the principal elements of this study of material culture and of the importance of miniaturisation.

“Strange objects enough:” miniature objects in working-class contexts

When nineteenth century social reformer Octavia Hill bustled into one poor woman’s dark and dingy “underground kitchen” and offered her bright and cheerful alternative accommodation, she was taken aback to be rebuffed with the words “my bits of things won’t look anything if you bring them to the light” (Hill 1875, 40). Such was the power of “bits of things” that even in the direst of circumstances, they meant something positive to their owners. This mysterious relationship between humans and prosaic objects is fascinating, and is important to investigate. It caught the attention of some observers at the time: “C.B.A.,” writing in George Godwin’s magazine *The Builder*, tells us that “always to be found in the room of the poorest and humblest, are what are termed ‘chimney ornaments.’ Strange objects enough. What sort of pleasure or mental delight they can give it would be curious to inquire; they are never of the smallest possible use” (C.B.A. 1870, 402–403).

My goal was to uncover evidence that adds significant detail to our limited knowledge of the lives of what was at the time the largest sector of the populations of all industrialising countries, building on my previous research (Mills 2010, 2015).

The majority of the contexts in which mass-produced miniatures would have occurred and/or have been found can be broadly classified as “working class”, or at least can be associated with ‘ordinary’ people, those who fall within the classification of being “of little note” (Scott 1994, 3).⁵ The homes, workplaces and environments inhabited by nineteenth-century “industrious classes” have, until recently, been regarded by many as unimportant and neither worth preserving nor recording.⁶ They have been destroyed by subsequent development or by “slum clearance”, unlike the more highly-valued, in social terms as well as financial, homes of the middle and upper classes.⁷ The material culture they contained, the things that made up their “object worlds” is therefore poorly known.⁸

This absence leaves a yawning gap that I feel it is important to attempt to fill. I have explored two ways of doing this. The first was to search out and utilise the words and images left by people who lived in the nineteenth century – not those written by historians, but those recorded at the time by journalists, by activists, by poets, by illustrators, by caricaturists, by artists, by musicians and lyricists, by unknown officials. The second was to adopt the role of what Michael Shanks and Ian Hodder called an “inventor:”

Discovery is invention. The archaeologist uncovers or discovers something; they come upon it. An inventor may be conceived to have come upon a discovery. Discovery and invention are united in their etymology: invenire in Latin means to come upon, to find or invent. Invention is both finding and

⁵ I discuss the thorny challenge of using the term “working class” below, p 70.

⁶ A term often used by nineteenth century writers, social organisations and pamphleteers (e.g. Lancaster 1803)

⁷ “Slum” is a contentious term, and “slum clearance” is politically and socially charged. I discuss this below, page 108.

⁸ See page 427.

creative power. The logic of invention, poetry and the imaginary is one of conjunction, making connections

(Shanks and Hodder 1995, 11)

Therefore, as an “inventor,” using my practices of archaeology and writing, I use my imagination to connect scraps of evidence in order to create “stories” that will give what Stephen Riggins calls a “flavour” of nineteenth-century reality (Riggins 1994, 115).

The value of miniature objects to archaeologists and historians

Culture is neither act nor artifact, but we can discover information about culture by working back from the acts and artifacts which are available for our scrutiny

(Beckow 1982, 116)

Though the nineteenth century experienced an explosion of Steven Beckow’s “acts and artifacts,” until recently the archaeology of the that century was routinely ignored in the Old World, and artefacts have been either not recorded or cast aside, perhaps apart from one or two ‘curiosities.’⁹ The situation in the New World is a little different, for there the nineteenth century has, since the 1970s, more often been recognised as the beginning of major urban growth and of contemporary societies, and the sites of “slums” and similar unpretentious locations have been excavated and recorded more frequently.¹⁰ In addition, many of the artefacts I have

⁹ As an archaeologist in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, I was complicit in this

¹⁰ Although nineteenth century material has been given more attention in the New World, archaeologists have still often applied cut-off dates (typically 1850) to their recording. Later material has also often been regarded as “curiosities” rather than the potential source of important information.

identified were so fragile or so little valued that they do not occur in archaeological deposits, and an examination of surviving evidence requires a forensic and inventive approach.

Archaeology does not (usually) have the ability to interact with and question living people, but has instead to deal with objects and their contexts, the things with which humans interacted in the past and their temporal and physical locations. Starting with, but going beyond, an archaeological approach to miniatures, my study is neither a cataloguing nor simply a social history project, but one in which I interrogate miniaturisation and miniature objects to establish as much as possible about an area of nineteenth century material culture. Jack Davy states that a miniature object is “an iconic resemblant of a prototype known to the intended audience” with whom it is deployed as “a tool of suggestion” (Davy 2015). It is my challenge to extract meanings from the miniature versions of a range of prototypes and what they suggested to people in the recent past.

In order to achieve these objectives, I use resource-based research methods, exploring object worlds, informed and enhanced by more experimental activities, using writing, photography and interaction with contemporary mass-produced miniatures. I also incorporate the material culture methods proposed by McClung Fleming (1982) and Jules Prown (2000), and my approach is also heavily influenced by the thinking of archaeologist Douglass Bailey (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2013).

Serendipitous research: exploring virtual resources

In this study I make extensive use of a serendipitous research methodology (Fine and Deegan 1996) that I define as an adventitious exploration of mostly-online databases, archives and similar resources in a manner analogous to archaeological “field walking.”¹¹ In this procedure a ground surface is methodically surveyed but all resulting discoveries are in a sense ‘accidental,’ are located on a two-dimensional surface, and one ‘find’ is likely to lead to others by their proximity. My virtual “field” is the worldwide web, and to use a horrible but appropriate cliché, “I let my fingers do the walking.”¹² In field walking, a system of location and measurement is usually applied, lending a degree of rigour to the activity. Similarly, in virtual “walking” across the surface of the Internet, a level of control can be utilised (for example standardising search terms, extending the search to only the first 100 records and so on). However, because of the interconnectedness and much-folded nature of the web, this is problematic, in that a single record can link instantly to thousands of others. The nearest I can get to visualising this is that it is if one were walking across a field in Yorkshire, in Russia, in Arizona and in New Zealand at the same time, and simultaneously peering into storerooms in museums that contain material previously found in those fields, while turning the pages of 150-year-old newspaper. This open-ended and open-minded approach frees me from the logistical limitations of research based on physical resources as opposed to their virtual equivalents, and

¹¹ Robert et al (2009, 26) state that “browsing and being alert to serendipitous discovery can substantially increase the yield and efficiency of search methods.”

¹² A slogan used by trade directory *Yellow Pages* in 1962

led to my being able to make important discoveries in Britain, Italy, France, Holland, Germany, Russia, North and South America, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

The material culture of miniaturisation

I hoped to add significant detail to a number of areas of material culture. There is, for example, almost no published material specifically focusing on the phenomenon of miniaturisation linked with mass-produced ornamental objects produced since the late eighteenth century. Most archaeological and historical thinking on miniaturisation has concentrated on prehistoric material, and even here the amount of published research is limited in both scope and imagination and does not match the importance of the subject. Published discussion of those miniatures that have been discovered in nineteenth century archaeological contexts has been generally limited to their recording and cataloguing. Where a more detailed approach has been made, this stands isolated, and my research will assist in the process of identifying and collecting material from around the world.¹³ This will encourage cross-border analysis and comparative interpretation for the first time.

I have previously written about the interpretive and analytical value of mass-produced miniatures (Mills 2015) and I continue to encourage archaeologists and historians to recognise the importance of the messages that, when interrogated, these artefacts can communicate about people in the recent past. I also address some of the interpretive challenges that miniatures raise in archaeological contexts,

¹³ "The world" is limited in this research to those countries involved in the industrial revolution. Other countries such as China, Japan and India had long-established traditions of miniaturisation that are beyond the scope of this project. It is also biased towards English-speaking countries, though as much material as possible in Italian, French, German and even a little Old Dutch and Swedish has been accessed.

such as the often-suggested presence of children and domestic gender roles. I therefore aim to provide additional interpretive tools for future archaeological projects, enabling archaeologists to at least consider additional scenarios when dealing with small things.

Plaster of Paris

As my explorations progressed I came across the existence of miniature objects manufactured using plaster of Paris. These have not generally survived to form part of the physical archaeological record.¹⁴ I have also discovered that at the time they were better known, or at least written about and illustrated more frequently, than tougher artefacts such as the ceramic Staffordshire figurines that we are familiar with today. I found that these plaster of Paris objects have the potential to add disproportionate amounts of information about the lives of their working-class owners, and I therefore shifted my focus to investigate them and the “object worlds” in which they existed.¹⁵

Information provided by the study of nineteenth-century plaster of Paris decorative objects can be applied to more robust objects. A plaster of Paris figurine of, say, an actor, almost certainly shared “meaning” with a ceramic or bronze representation of the same individual. That the ceramic and bronze versions were increasingly expensive led to their presence being limited to middle- and upper-class interiors and their acquisition taking place in shops rather than the street. The “meaning” on the other hand was independent of its setting. It was the same actor, famous for the same reasons. And what my research has shown is that there was far more contemporary knowledge of those objects at the bottom of this hierarchy of materiality.

¹⁴ A few of these artefacts, usually identified as “chalkware,” have survived as curated “antique” objects, and because of their scarcity attract significant and sometimes huge prices at auction.

¹⁵ See page 427.

I worked to increase our knowledge of the ways miniatures were designed, manufactured, promoted, traded and sold in nineteenth-century industrialising countries. Armed with what I learned, I discuss the importance of some extremely numerous miniatures, for example, Staffordshire dogs and figurines of Napoleon Bonaparte, as well as the more mysterious, such as so-called “Frozen Charlotte” figurines. In attempting to meet Douglass Bailey’s challenge to “go beyond archaeology” (Bailey 2013) my work adds to the development of alternative methods to traditional excavation in order to obtain and share information about the everyday lives of ‘ordinary’ people in the recent past. By a natural extension, I hope that this exploration will also influence thinking about present-day miniatures.

Mini-me: my involvement in this study

I am very much present in and part of this study (Figure 5). I justify this as presenting an individual reflection of a general human relationship with miniaturisation. As I explain below, this relationship begins with the sense of sight I share with other humans and the manner in which my eyes view the world in miniature and my brain manipulates that information. As a sighted person I cannot escape a direct physiological involvement with miniaturisation. This basic relationship is compounded by a life-long awareness of and interest in the miniature. As someone who’s creative practice is writing, I begin the results of my studies with a series of narratives – “encounters” – that start with my childhood acquisition and adult

rediscovery of a miniature dustbin lorry.¹⁶ I end this study with two “tales” that pull together a little of what I have learned.



Figure 5: A resin “mini-me” miniature of the author, alongside a ceramic miniature of Queen Victoria (author’s collection). Height 18 cm.

¹⁶ See page 24.

Pat Thompson, discussing academic writing, calls this approach a “personal narrative” and explains that it has three purposes: to locate the researcher in the project so that examiners can see how the researcher’s life might influence the work, to show how the work “arises from the personal life or professional experience of the researcher” and to lay “ground work for a claim of professional knowledge” (Thompson 2016). As someone coming to the project with professional backgrounds in both field archaeology and writing, these purposes fit well within my methodologies.

2: Encounters with miniaturisation



Figure 6: The author grappling with the challenges of scale.

The following narratives link miniature objects with my personal experience (Figure 6). Their function is to suggest that these small-scale prosaic artefacts play disproportionately important roles in our lives, and by extension, the lives of those who interacted with miniature things in the past. Since archaeologists do not have time machines, and are only able to discover a scatter of physical clues about past lives, they necessarily fill gaps in knowledge with stories. Thus the archaeological interpretation of a Victorian parlour uses objective clues to write an interesting,

comfortable, believable but subjective fiction. For example, I use a deliberately bent knife to dig mortar from between bricks and a screwdriver with which to stir paint. Similarly, a Victorian may have used that bent knife we found on an archaeological site for some purpose completely different to what we interpret or suggest as its function. When confronted with mute evidence we are forced to create plausible stories, based on context and parallels, to cover our lack of definitive knowledge.

In this section I utilise subjective elements such as emotions, touch and speculation that I discuss further in the *Methods* section. My *encounters* are heavily influenced by my own background as an archaeologist and an individual engaged in experiencing miniatures (Figure 6) in ways that may mirror the experiences of nineteenth century people. Archaeology has perhaps suffered as the result of a dialectic between the subjective experiences of individuals: Susan Stewart's somatic material memories (Stewart 1999), and the objective, but "dead," descriptive taxonomic cataloguing of material culture.

My narratives are presented in a different font to distinguish them from the rest of this study.

A Dinky dustbin lorry

For my sixth birthday, in 1954, I received (perhaps I chose) a toy garbage truck, what I would call a “dustbin lorry,” my very first Dinky toy.¹⁷ At the time my family lived in the Yemen, at Steamer Point, Aden, looking out over the Red Sea and the never-ending convoy of ships arriving to take on fuel and leaving, their tanks and bunkers full as they headed for the Suez Canal or the Indian Ocean. The contrast between a very prosaic, very British, Bedford lorry and the exotic, arid, troubled place in which we lived didn’t strike me at the time, of course, and the little vehicle became just the first of a small collection of cars and trucks destined to collect dust from floors on three continents as my family moved back to the UK and then to Australia. Eventually of course the dustbin lorry disappeared, probably worn out and battered by the robust attentions of my siblings and I. But I never forgot it. It was perhaps significant that this first delight should be in a utilitarian vehicle, and an unglamorous one at that, rather than a more attractive motor car from the Dinky range.

In April 2105 I spotted a scarred but complete example of the same model dustbin lorry in an antiques centre in York, and I bought it (Figure 7). I had been looking for this for a while, not obsessively, but whenever I came across a sales display of old die-cast vehicles. I could probably have bought one, perhaps cheaper, online, but somehow discovering one in a shop seemed more

¹⁷ Dinky Toys were die-cast metal miniature vehicles manufactured in Liverpool by Meccano Ltd between 1935 and 1979.

“authentic” (whatever that means); it was certainly more satisfying.



Figure 7: Dinky Toys Bedford refuse truck, 1950s. Collection of the author.

The lorry has two curved sliding upper panels through which, in its full-scale original, the contents of dustbins would be tipped into its bed, and a swinging rear flap. Turning a small handle raises the truck bed, allowing the contents to slide out through the flap. As I waited for my credit card to be approved I closed and opened the panels and felt, re-experienced, revisited, a sensation that I hadn't registered for...how long...50 years...longer?

My memory of handling the toy as a child had survived, but now I had added, or reconnected, a physical dimension to it – metal sliding against metal, the weight of the lorry, its chipped paint rough against my fingertips. Why was this connection important enough for me to pay to repeat it? It hasn't *changed*

my memory of playing with the original on the concrete in front the tree-shaded bungalow at Steamer Point, a place not seen since and now caught up once again in conflict (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Ralph Mills, aged six, outside the Officers' Married Quarters, Steamer Point, Aden, 1954.

Perhaps the dustbin lorry is a memory *materialised*. It has provided me with a step-change in power, power over my own memories, an increase in what I might call the “voltage” of those memories, a transformation. It seems that for me at least, this miniature vehicle acts as both a facilitator of memory and as a transformer.

My acquisition of a timeworn, 60-year-old, toy demonstrates some of the fascinating aspects of miniature things. Firstly, that I remembered such an unspectacular object so clearly. Secondly that that memory encouraged me to search out, purchase and curate its manifestation. Thirdly the relationship between an adult and a “childish” object that had and has no use other than satisfying a personal desire. Fourthly, that the object reflects something of myself back to me. It is on display in a private space – my study. It is there mostly for me to see. It is an element of my self-identification. And finally, just as in the heat of Aden so long ago, I take delight in it.

The key



Figure 9: Triang clockwork vehicle key. Collection of the author.

My original research into miniaturisation was inspired by the presence on my desk of an object (Figure 9) that I had unearthed in the garden of my then home in Nottingham – the key (“Type 2”) of a Triang clockwork car, a tinplate miniature plaything probably dating from the early 1960s.¹⁸ I realised that although it could be identified and dated, its significance was not so easily describable.

In searching for the identity of the key, I discovered that all the 40-year-old examples I located of Triang clockwork cars (and their keys) were owned, collected and cared for, not by children, but by adults (mostly male). Many cars bore the scars of having once been playthings, but others were in pristine, unused condition, still retaining their original packaging. All these objects were no longer playthings, if they had ever been. If they had been found in an archaeological context, they would have almost certainly have been labelled

¹⁸ Triang manufactured a range of model railways and other children’s toys from 1946 to 1972, when the company was bought by Hornby Railways.

“child-related,” called “toys” and given only the broad-brush meaning(s) associated with objects to which this low “value” has usually been ascribed (Sofaer Derevenski 2000, 7). Adults delight in small, “childish,” things, as demonstrated by three members of my immediate family.

My mother

My mother was someone constrained by her own personality as well as by the times through which she lived and the personality of my father. She was a talented artist who sold her paintings in the USA, but had neither the confidence nor the support to pursue this as a career even when she had the opportunity to do so. She dreamed of being at the centre of a vast, communal, extended family, but instead bore four children who deserted her to follow distant paths scattered across the UK and the globe. As she grew older my mother increasingly used her creative abilities to make, decorate and dress large families of tiny dolls, who dwelt in fantastic, chaotic shoe-box dolls-houses crammed with mismatched ‘antique’ furniture, with decorative and often eccentric touches added from her own imagination and memory. The dolls became surrogate children, and the shoe boxes fantasy homes. I am certain that these miniature objects provided comfort in representing my mother’s frustrated dreams of a close-knit family over which she could rule, benevolently, as matriarch.

My sister

My sister has spent much of her life as a single parent, and for more than two

decades has suffered from MS. She has never had a job, and at present lives independently in a small suburban semi-detached house in a nondescript small town in Lincolnshire. Although externally her home is unremarkable, inside, every surface is scattered with a myriad of much-loved and well-dusted ornamental objects, the majority of them miniatures, some of which originally belonged to my mother, but many others that she has acquired herself. These objects range from cheap (and sometimes fake) Victoriana through 1960s Matchbox toys to Wallace and Grommit 'dolls.'¹⁹ For someone with limited mobility, the world is significantly constrained. My sister's miniatures bring the world into her home, giving her the power to experience and have control over at least an important part of her environment.

My brother

A skilled woodworker who has nevertheless spent his working life in roles where his creativity has been restricted to his spare time, since his retirement my brother has been able to brush the dust from the tools in his workshop. He lives in a tiny terraced cottage. On his study wall is a small glass-fronted case that contains several shelves filled with tiny figures. These represent an unhurried collecting activity that began 40 years ago and still continues (two tiny figurines destined for the case wait on his kitchen windowsill). Each miniature cost a pound or two and often less. There is a theme – they are all cake-top ornaments made from bisque porcelain. A few are painted, but most are uncoloured. To me, his collection represents the influence of our mother,

¹⁹ Matchbox Toys were die-cast miniature vehicles introduced in 1953 and manufactured in various forms until the present. Wallace and Grommit were popular animation characters.

something that has also infected my sister and myself, and the delight concentrated in small things.

My mother's unachieved wish for a close family led her to create a miniature replacement, a world of tiny people, to provide company and over which she could wield affectionate power. Her interest in small-scale things was communicated to and continued by several of her children, though each had different driving forces behind their collections.

The Hucknall Miniaturists Society

In a room off the almost-empty gloomy bar of Hucknall Conservative Club eight ladies sit around a table (Figure 10). Before them is a scatter of small pots of glue and an assortment of raffia and craft materials. This evening's task is the manufacture of miniature baskets, 1/12th scale. Between instructions from the workshop leader, the group gossip, but also revisit recent achievements, both collective and individual, in exhibitions of dolls-house miniatures. Their finely detailed creations are often nostalgic and sometimes visit distant pasts of which the members have no memory, or are steeped in affection for family life. A shared delight in objects smaller than their thumbnails brings these ladies together every Thursday evening to create miniature worlds.



Figure 10: Hucknall Miniaturists Society. Photograph, the author.

It seems that miniaturisation might be a basic human activity, one that is not only displayed on the mantelpiece, but can be engaged in socially. The Miniaturists develop individual skills, use imagination and creativity, learn and teach. They also gossip and drink together. Their friendships are, in the end, encapsulated in tiny baskets, miniscule dioramas.

A mantelpiece in Wales

Two young women turn empty gazes towards the newspaper photographer and me, eyes set in faces slackened by hardship (Figure 11). I become a voyeur, peering uninvited into their home and noting its materiality, much like George Godwin in Plumtree Court. One of three infants frowns in my direction, leaning forward in an armchair that has a stained and torn cover. The women could have been beautiful. A coal fire burns in a smoke-stained tile-surrounded fireplace. The background is of patterned wallpaper. Clothing hangs from the ceiling to dry.



Figure 11: Seven people living in one room, 1964/65, Merthyr Tydfil. (Treorchy library).

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-31924410>

The photo is captioned *Seven people living in one room 1964/65 Merthyr Tydfil*. Men are significantly absent. It's a scene of almost cliché poverty, and the use of black and white photography emphasises the room's gloom. It is, nevertheless, an object world.²⁰ On the mantelpiece stand an ashtray, a miniature beast, probably a puma, and an alarm clock. People in the household smoke and lead lives that require attention to time keeping.



Figure 12: Miniature puma on mantelpiece of Merthyr Tydfil home. (Detail).

²⁰ See page 427.

They also choose to place an image of a handsome, lithe, slinking animal, one that can symbolise courage and power, on their mantelpiece (Figure 12). In this case the miniature is probably moulded from plastic, but that doesn't matter. The puma represents something that is probably absent in this overcrowded household but is probably desperately wished for – power.

The miniature animal on the Welsh mantelpiece to me symbolises defiance and resistance to the difficult situation these seven people face. It shows that a tiny, prosaic object can speak of big, important things.

Two transparencies

In 2015, the Visual Resource Centre in Manchester School of Art was threatened with closure. The Centre consisted of a small room crammed with metal filing cabinets, the drawers of which contained 35mm transparencies slotted into plastic sheets. To communicate our opposition to the closure, we students were asked to “adopt” a slide; to find a transparency and write about it on a specially created blog. I came across not one but these two related images (Figure 13) in a drawer labelled “taste.”

The photographs were taken on the same occasion, of the same location, a (presumably) double-fronted shop. There is no other information on the Kadachrome slide mounts other than a reference number and the date, August 1973. The windows appear to be of a junk shop that was displaying a vast number of small objects.



Figure 13: Two transparencies, Manchester School of Art Visual Resource Centre.

The array of knick-knacks is an impressive one, and includes a full range of miniatures. These have been carefully arranged, which makes the display unusual. These two slides formed a rare and hugely valuable record of an historical archaeology site and of an assemblage of artefacts captured and fossilised on that warm day in the early 1970s.



Figure 14: Miniature horses in Manchester shop window, 1973 (detail).

In one window there's a veritable miniature *harras* of horses all galloping in the same direction, regardless of relative scale (Figure 14). To the right, a gossip of old ladies is observed from afar by a weary old ceramic man. There is at least one rosy-cheeked boy (the humans are all turned 90 degrees relative to the horses), and, along the very front, there's a row of wonderful miniature oddities — a pair of tiny telephones, three mischievous mice, two strange mushroomy objects, a ceramic candle, three tiny beer steins, fake fruit...oh that the view had been panoramic! What marvels lay beyond the slide's cardboard frame?

In the other window, a fantastic visual cacophony of cheap and cheerful

miniatureness (without horses), again all looking toward the left (Figure 15): a chaotic cuteness of children, dogs, elephants, birds, a squad of squirrels, cheerful country folk, chipmunks, milkmaids, cats and artificial fruit. Hundreds of big eyes gazing beseechingly at passers-by. In the background is a tumble of carving sets, bottle openers and china bells. Wonderful!



Figure 15: Miniatures in Manchester shop window 1973 (detail).

The slide wasn't captioned, but that doesn't matter. It is a precious record of a moment in time, of the objects people loved and hated, desired and discarded, of what people regarded as good and bad taste in the recent past. The photographs were probably taken by a member of Manchester School of Art's teaching staff. I wonder who was lecturing about "taste" in 1973?

The windows are carefully arranged, the objects sorted in to types, the types divided between displays. Within each section, scale is ignored, though larger items are positioned towards the rear. That the miniatures face in the same

direction (to the left of each display) is perhaps significant, but it is challenging to my sense of symmetry that the mass of objects in both windows face in the same direction!

These objects reminded me of the “small things” in some of the photographs in William Billingham’s significant collection *Ray’s a Laugh* (1998). In these, several shelves of miniatures act as a backdrop and audience to the dramas being played out in the mid-ground. Billingham places us again as voyeurs, uncomfortably witnessing performances of desperate, dysfunctional intimacy.

Figure 16: *Liz Shaking Fist at Ray*, Richard Billingham.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/photography/genius/gallery/billingham.shtml>

Somehow, in the midst of a chaotic life, “Big Liz,” Billingham’s mother, created a collection of bric-à-brac (Figure 16). Within what Billingham called her “carnavalesque” “psychological space” (Billingham 2009) I interpret those mute objects displaying a significant element of her character, a side of her not immediately obvious amongst the cigarette butts and empty beer bottles.

The two transparencies tell of loss and absence – the destruction of a resource centre, the extinction of a photographic technology, the disappearance of a junk shop and the anonymity of the subject. These are familiar challenges to archaeologists. They record a mass of miniature artefacts that also have been lost, yet which still are able to inform us about taste and delight. And these windows filled with “useless” things link to the shelves of ornaments that act as backdrops to so many domestic performances, good and bad. And at one time, each one of those hundreds of miniature things was desired, acquired and delighted in.

A tipper wagon from Ghent, Belgium



Figure 17: O gauge Marklin tipper wagon, before 1946. (Foreground, HO9 tipper wagon) Author's collection. (Scale = 5 cm).

In the summer of 2015 I spent a pleasurable couple of hours in Ghent's MIAT museum of industry and technology. On my way back into the city centre I passed an antiques centre, doing desultory business on a warm and sleepy Sunday afternoon. In a display of vintage railway rolling stock I noticed a single wagon that I could afford to buy – an O gauge (1:45) tipper wagon manufactured by Marklin in Germany before 1946 (Figure 17). I handed over €15 and carried on, triumphant.

The wagon is a relatively crude representation of its original. It is made from tinfoil, held together by tabs fitted through slots and bent over. The body of the wagon is held upright by a simple U-shaped double-ended rod that if moved from its upright position allows the body to tip sideways, dumping its load (presumably into some form of hopper). The wagon's paint shows evidence of a fair degree of use. Beneath the truck's body is a label in several languages indicating where it should be oiled.

The wagon is firstly a personal souvenir of Ghent, something that will trigger memories of my visit. It also has a number of other meanings for me, as its collector. It will join a small number of other railway artefacts on display in my study, including a much smaller tipper wagon in HO9 scale (1:87). This collection is evidence of a continuing interest in miniature railways and of a so far frustrated dream of constructing a model railway of my own. As a tinfoil railway artefact it reminds me of the long-lost Hornby O gauge clockwork railway my brothers and I would construct around the floor of our bedroom,

the track winding amongst the legs of our beds.

The wagon, despite being of a reasonable size, is hugely simplified. This reflects the limits of technologies at the time of its design and manufacture. A present-day example would use plastic injection moulding techniques allowing much more accurate detailing. This in its turn is being replaced and refined by 3D printing technology (see Meyer 2013 for an early example of a laser-scanned and 3D printed miniature of a railway locomotive).

Despite its simplicity, when it was created the wagon would have satisfied the demands of its target purchaser. It was robust enough to be handled roughly and used on track that was usually located on the floor. It had a semi-automated action (a trackside trigger would strike the lever to operate the tipping action). Clockwork trains had limited controls, so derailments, both accidental and deliberate, were frequent. And perhaps for reasons some of which might be similar to my own, these inaccurate, battered objects are still enthusiastically and sometimes obsessively collected, with locomotives especially achieving high prices amongst specialist retailers and auctions.

At first glance, the tipper wagon is simply the nostalgic indulgence of a middle-aged male. It serves no purpose, is not part of a model railway, and is not in the least accurately detailed. Its principal function, however, is as a *souvenir*, a memory of a visit to Belgium, an exotic, unusual, non-British object that combines a personal interest in industrial archaeology with enjoyment of travel.

A girl with Staffordshire dog and parrot



Figure 18: A ceramic figure of a girl with Staffordshire dog and parrot (1860s). Author's collection. (Scale = 10cm).

Standing on a fringed stool, the girl wears a check skirt, dark blue blouse and red sash (Figure 18). On her head, a tilted cockade hat. She holds out food to a parrot that is perched on a clock face surrounded by grapes and vine leaves. A slightly deranged-looking Staffordshire dog rolls its eyes. The time is forever 11:17.

I pounced on this “flatback” figure in a Devon charity shop. It is not a thing of outstanding beauty. The under-glaze painting is crude, the girl’s nose is slightly damaged, and the whole thing might be what one antique shop calls “faux-Staffordshire.” The figure speaks to me of several relevancies: it is something of an entrée...I discuss parrots and Staffordshire dogs later in this research.²¹ The grapes tell of the exotic. The non-clock is a reaction to poverty, the desire for a real timepiece assuaged by the purchase of a cheap ornament. The whole object reminds me of the colour these figures brought to nineteenth-century interiors.

Very few miniatures are accurate representations. My flatback includes an unrealistic dog, an approximate parrot, a non-functional clock in the midst of a grape vine, an unlikely stool and a girl with dots for eyes. The whole is painted with daubs of colour. It demonstrates that the object is communicating *ideas*. No-one expects to find a parrot perched on a clock in a grape vine being fed by a girl standing on a stool being watched by a dog. Nevertheless the miniature scene conveys something satisfying. Quite what that is depends on the viewer.

Two ballerina clocks

Two figurines demonstrate the bizarre themes that can often be expressed in miniaturisation (Figure 19). In real life, one rarely comes across a ballerina leaning on a clock. I discovered two in local charity shops. The dancers, though long-legged, are otherwise somewhat amply proportioned. They are, of course, fantasy women, all legs and busts.

²¹ Parrots: see page 231. Staffordshire dogs: see page 339.



Figure 19: Two electric clocks with ballerinas. Author's collection (Scale = 5cm).

The figurines have experienced different “social lives.” One shows evidence of water damage. Now, their batteries replaced, they keep approximate time on a shelf in my study. They represent a desire to be associated with litheness, with idealised female beauty, with an exotic art form (few of those who would purchase this ornament would ever get to experience a live ballet performance). That the design includes a cheap electric clock refers back to the flatback I discussed above, and may also represent a grounding – the wish to show that the purchase was not completely feckless.



Figure 20: Ballerina pigs. Author's collection (scale = 5cm).

It is worth comparing the two clock-leaning ballerinas, who share a semi-utilitarian function of showing the time, with the two ballerinas in Figure 20. These deliberately grotesque pigs in pink underwear are unreal, yet have to be believable to “work.” We have to suspend disbelief, and provide these characters with a modicum of being. They comment on unlikely, if not impossible conflicting ideas, on the humour in the unlikely combination of porkiness and agility. They are slightly obscene, but only if we grant them the power to be so, otherwise they are merely a pair of pink plastic lumps.

Charity shop shelves often display clusters of miniature objects that have no equivalent in real life – miniscule bears and mice that live in tiny teapot houses, jolly pigs playing guitars, cute kittens with wide smiles, grinning dogs dressed in human clothing. These outlandish objects, like my ballerina-clocks and ballerina pigs, rely on our conspiring with them to give them “life.” We have to “believe” in an obese ballerina pig, grant it the possibility of being able to exist, to dance, in order to find it amusing, or perhaps horrifying.

Love letters

A very young lady in miniature is evidence that small things can be mildly erotic (Figure 21). Another charity shop purchase, she sits with sensual abandon, on a bed, her skirt tugged up to reveal stocking tops. She appears to represent a gypsy, and is therefore associated with ideas of passion and prejudice, wildness and wantonness. She is reading letters, and we are put in the position of being the person who wrote them, of imagining their content, and of being her lover. That she seems to be only just of legal age to be the recipient of our attentions and lascivious gaze can only inject elements of risk, of the excitement of behaviour that would be frowned on.

In acquiring this object we are perhaps able to indulge in a fantasy without attracting opprobrium. It can be explained away as simply an ornament that is telling a story (a pretty girl reading letters from her lover). But in the original artwork by Christine Haworth on which this figurine is based, the girl appears even younger. We might be being encouraged to think of underage sexuality. Miniatures of scantily-attired youngsters of both genders are (and were) common, though their meanings are often disguised behind their appearance as fairies and the like.



Figure 21: *Love letters* figure (The Leonardo Collection, after Christine Haworth). Author's collection (scale = 5cm).

The archaeology of charity shops can reveal a spread of human emotional responses to miniature objects, from laughter through to lust. This figure, in which a tiny, attractive and alluring girl, her clothing in disarray, gazes at us, is, despite its diminutive size, erotic. It represents an important vein of enabling fantasy that runs through these objects, and allows us a glimpse into the minds of those who owned similar things in the past.

“A crude white porcelain figure:” From Sandhills to Sandpoint



Figure 22: Crude white porcelain figures of naked children. Author’s collection.

Amongst the eclectic and eccentric collection of miniature “specimens” on display in my study stand two tiny naked female babies. Made from glazed, unpainted bisque porcelain, with minimally-sculpted features, and less than five centimetres tall, one has, like the Venus de Milo, lost most of her arms, while the other is complete (Figure 22). They were found in an antique store in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. They are, in the words of archaeologist Eleanor Casella, “crude white porcelain figures.”

Casella found a “crude white porcelain figure” on the site of Hagg Cottages in

Sandhills, Alderley Edge, Cheshire: it is a naked child, its limbs immovable, its extremities broken off. It would have been about 5cm tall when complete (Casella 2004) (Figure 23). A tiny crude white porcelain figure of a naked child less than 2cm tall, its limbs immovable, was found on the Thames foreshore in June 2016 by a “mudlark” (Figure 24). A metal detectorist, exploring the site of the 1863 battle of Champion Hill, found the remains of a carpetbag filled with unused ammunition and a crude white porcelain figure of a naked child (Bearss 2005). When the wreck of the steamship *Arabia* was excavated in 1988 a carpenter’s chest was discovered in the hold. Inside the chest, wrapped in a sock, was a crude white porcelain figure of a naked child (Arabia Steamboat Museum 2011). Renovations at the Randell Cottage, in Christchurch, New Zealand, revealed a crude white porcelain figure of a naked child hidden in a wall (Museum of New Zealand 2009) (Figure 25). In “Little Lon” Casselden Place, Melbourne, Australia, a notorious “slum,” archaeological excavations uncovered a crude white porcelain figure of a naked child (Smith and Hayes 2010). Recent archaeological investigations of Willa Herman’s Bordello, in Sandpoint, Idaho, produced two crude white porcelain figures of naked children (Swords 2012) (Figure 26).

These tiny, usually naked, figures are a mystery to which people have offered solutions, but each solution is different and anecdotal. Archaeologists regularly unearth them in every “westernised” country, and equally regularly identify them as children’s playthings. They are probably not playthings. By definition they are stiff, unmoving, hard, shiny, uninteresting, easily

swallowed, easily broken (many of the excavated examples have lost their forearms, which jut out at right angles to their bodies).

Figure 23: crude white porcelain figure of naked child found Haggs Cottage, Cheshire (Cassela 2004)

Figure 24: Crude white porcelain figure of naked child found on the Thames foreshore

<http://tinyurl.com/hl6bnva>

Figure 25: Crude white porcelain figure of naked child found hidden in a wall of Randell's Cottage, Christchurch, New Zealand (Anon nd).

<http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/8368>

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Figure 26: Crude white porcelain figure of naked children found at Willa Herman's bordello, Sandpoint, Idaho (Swords 2012).

Until recently these unremarkable objects were nameless, hence Casella's description. Because of their immobility, in the US they have acquired the name "Frozen Charlotte," adopting the title of an early nineteenth century

song *Young Charlotte*.²² They have also called been called “Penny Dolls,” though I think that a penny is too high a price to pay for this crude lump of bisque porcelain, and there were plenty of jointed “Penny Dolls.” Sometimes called “Pillar Dolls” or “Pudding Dolls,” in Germany they were called “Badepuppen” (“Bathing Babies”) and “Nacktfrosch” (“Naked Babies”).²³ Researching these two latter titles is problematic for sadly obvious reasons, as is another common identification “China Babies.”

These figurines range in size from smaller than 10 mm up to 10cm (some similar but much larger figures are up to 50cm tall). They are almost all naked, and sometimes ambiguously-gendered. More obviously male figurines are sometimes referred to as “Charlies.” Many others are definitely female.

A minority of the figures have painted eyes and hair, others, especially those from Germany, have a moulded bonnet, while a few are moulded and sometimes painted, as fully dressed. They seem to have been manufactured between 1820 and 1914, in Germany and England, though they may have been made in other countries. Those survivors that are sold by the dozen on *eBay* and *etsy* web sites are mostly seconds and wasters from a waste dump on a German pottery site. But those found in archaeological contexts present a puzzling picture. None of the following suggestions as to what function these diminutive creatures performed have been backed by solid evidence.

²² Written in 1843 by Seba Smith (see Lord 1966 and Higgins 2002). The song was also sometimes entitled *A Corpse Going to a Ball*.

²³ “Bathing Babies” were only glazed on one side, so that they would float in water. They appear to be considerably larger than “Frozen Charottes.”

Pen wiper:

The figure would have had a multi-layered skirt, on which people using dip pens would wipe excess ink (Figure 27). The anonymous maker of the example from Godey's Lady's Book used "a black china baby about three inches tall."²⁴



Figure 27: *The Miss Dinah Pen-wiper*. Anon, *Godey's Ladies Book*, May 1861, p 451.

Tea cooler:

In polite society, blowing on one's tea to cool it would be frowned on, so the small figure would be dropped into the cup to absorb some of the heat.

Teapot crack preventer:

A figure would be dropped into the teapot before adding water, the theory being that the heat absorbed by the figurine would avoid the teapot cracking.

²⁴ For the racial and abuse implications of this seemingly innocent object see Bernstein 2011, 206.

Dress form:

The figure would be used as a basic form on which to sew dolls' clothes. Given the diminutive size of many of these figures, this is unlikely.

Plaything:

The common identification of these objects as children's playthings is arguable. The figures were often small enough to be easily swallowed, and since their limbs couldn't be moved, they would be difficult to dress and pose in meaningful positions, and would thus be very uninteresting playthings. There were many other "penny dolls" available that had moveable limbs. An exception could be the larger "Bathing Baby" type, which was intended to be float on water. Their discovery in adult locations – for example taverns, a brothel, a carpenter's chest, the collection of an elderly lady, San Francisco harbour – also makes this connection doubtful.

Pudding doll:

It is suggested that the figures were placed in a pudding or cake mix before cooking, and that finding the object when eating the dish would result in good luck or fertility. It would also likely break a tooth.

Cake decoration:

It is unlikely that these figures were used as cake-top decorations. A parallel group of tiny figures specifically manufactured for this purpose can be identified. It includes a variety of animals and other designs more appropriate

for ceremonial occasions (Figure 28).



Figure 28: “Miss Muffet” cake decorations. Photograph Andrew Mills. Height approx. 3cm.

Sewing needle lubrication

Beeswax was often used to lubricate sewing needles, especially when sewing stiff or thick materials. Tiny figurines were dipped repeatedly into molten beeswax, and once this had hardened it could be used to coat needles (Figure 29). This might explain the presence of the “Frozen Charlotte” in the carpenter’s chest found of the *Arabia*.

Figure 29: Figurines used as beeswax holders.

<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/97/0e/92/970e927b60f6cfd200c98db90cc4a531.jpg>

https://img1.etsystatic.com/064/1/7592900/il_fullxfull.763432183_a2f8.jpg

Memento mori

There appears to be an association of “Frozen Charlotte” type figures and miniature coffins. In recent times this seems to be more creative than sinister, and is probably connected with the “Goth” movement. In the early twentieth century, tiny figures in coffins may have represented a ghoulish sense of humour (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Miniature “gag” coffins, presumably given to chatterboxes.

<http://www.therecord.com/living-story/2618139-this-old-thing-stained-glass-window-is-worth-about-275/>

<http://rebloggy.com/post/death-weird-halloween-dead-antique-haunted-goth-steampunk-gothic-mysterious-vict/87040880402>

In the nineteenth century, with its high death rate amongst very young children, tiny figurines may have memorialised infant deaths. Although post mortem photographs are well known, there is little evidence of the memorialisation of dead children in other ways.

Matrimonial prospects:

A possible clue to the roles of these figures might be found in a small number of carved wooden bottles. On the exterior is a short sentence that reads “Matrimonial Prospects at [a place name]” I have come across bottles from

San Francisco, Ashbury Park (New Jersey) and “So Boston”.

Figure 31: Matrimonial Prospects (wooden) bottles with figurines

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/280915878/vintage-matrimonial-prospects-game>

The bottle is corked, and when the cork is withdrawn, attached to it is a string, hanging from which are two or more tiny ceramic (and sometimes base metal) figures, often with at least one figure being black (Figure 31). Other examples feature two figures hanging from the cork of a small stoneware jug and four black figures issuing from a tiny wooden phial. A St Louis World's

Fair bottle can be dated to 1904 In an article on “gag boxes” Mardi Timm, a collector of “novelties,” mentions “little wooden pill bottles, with a cork or some kind of stopper in the top. One of these older ones from the early 1900s says ‘Matrimonial Prospects, Handle With Care’ on the outside. And when you pull the cork out, there’s a string attached to it and on it are little metal women, who are naked. It’s a strange, sexist thing” (Hix 2012).

The exact meaning of these “Matrimonial Prospects” objects is not clear. All examples found so far originate in the US. It is not clear whether they were suggesting a series of spouses or a series of offspring. The figures were often female. Some were all black; others included both black and white figures. They may have suggested that one had poor prospects of matrimony, represented by a string of crude dolls, or they might be making a racist comment.

Figure 32: “Gag” box with “black kids.”

<http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/how-your-grandpa-got-his-lols/>

Robin Bernstein quotes a writer remembering the mid nineteenth century when “very small dolls of black china were supposed to be the proper thing for servants in dolls houses” (Bernstein 2011, 205). Whether the “very small dolls” were of the Frozen Charlotte type isn’t clear, but apart from the designation of black doll = servant, it implies that the very small dolls had white equivalents.

Charms:

The widespread finds of these small figurines (on all continents), and the adult nature of many of their locations (harbours, brothels, taverns, prisons, ranches, a battlefield etc.), suggests that they may have been carried as good luck charms.²⁵ The equally frequent occurrence of ceramic dolls’ limbs indicates that these may have served the same function (they are available today, made into pendants on the *etsy* web site).

I am fascinated by these objects. That they might possess some deeper meaning is suggested by their similarity with much older artefacts. The German figures bear a striking resemblance to medieval “Kruselerpuppen,” small pipeclay or earthenware figurines wearing an elaborate Kruseler cap (Figure 33). The functions of these figures are uncertain but it has been

²⁵ e.g. For example, during the 1994 Mini Metro excavations in San Francisco, 34 fragmentary Frozen Charlottes were found (Anon 2002). Frozen Charlottes were found in Willa Herma’s Bordello, Sandpoint Idaho (Swords 2012), Oatlands Gaol (Fidge 2013) and Los Penasquitos Ranch House (Mirsky 1993, 179).

suggested that they were associated with christenings, weddings, votive offerings or pilgrimage (Schmudlach 2008). Even more ancient parallels can be found amongst prehistoric figurines. For example, a 20,000-year-old figurine discovered in Mal'ta, in Siberia (Hitchcock 2016), could easily be mistaken for a Frozen Charlotte at first sight (Figure 34).

**Figure 33: Kruseler Puppchen, 14th/15th century.
Germany. (Schmudlach 2008).**

<http://www.landschaftsmuseum.de/Seiten/Lexikon/Spiele-Puppen.htm>

**Figure 34: Mal'ta figurine,
Palaeolithic, Siberia.
(Hitchcock 2016).**

<http://donsmaps.com/malta.html>

These tiny, crude miniature ceramic figures tell a more complex and mysterious story than their popular interpretations suggest. They demonstrate a possible link with artefacts from the very distant past, whose functions we can only guess at and argue over, and with medieval objects whose uses are again unclear. This stresses that archaeology, even of a period as recent as 150 years ago, can present interpretive challenges and risk knee-jerk responses. At the end of my discussion I am no nearer a definitive explanation of a “crude white porcelain figure,” but am even more fascinated by its possibilities.

A Venus



Figure 35: Venus de Milo. Resin. Author's collection.

Figure 36: Venus de Milo. Marble. The Louvre

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MG-Paris-Aphrodite_of_Milos.jpg



Figure 37: Head of resin Venus

Figure 38: Head of original Venus

I found my Venus in my local Oxfam shop. She cost £1.99, and needed a wash. Made of resin, she stands 15cm tall. She's different to the original, apart from her miniature stature (Figure 35). True to the theory of miniaturisation, the sculptor has omitted much detail, especially of the folds of the drapery and her hair. Her shape has changed too – her torso is shorter, or her legs longer, in proportion to her whole body, than the original (Figure 36). Her waist is more pronounced, her breasts smaller, her shoulders straighter. This could be identified as a more “modern” body shape. Her face is very different (Figure 37), more rounded, her eyes proportionally larger and rounder, her mouth smaller, her nose (damaged in my version) smaller...a younger face. She seems to gaze more directly at the observer, unlike the slightly pensive gaze of the original (Figure 38). She demonstrates how a miniature, though based on a very well-know original, can communicate subtle aspects of the expectations of the period in which it is manufactured.

Miniature Venuses were one of the most popular mantelpiece ornaments during the nineteenth century, and I discuss this further below (*see page 319*). My Venus, with her “modern” touches, demonstrates some of the challenges of miniaturisation, as well as suggesting that we should look at the miniatures not only as representing an ancient statue, but also subtly reflecting contemporary influences.

3: “The importance of trifles”²⁶

The background to the study

There is so much to learn not only from the things we value but also from the rubbish, detritus and discarded things

(Attfield 2000, xv)

“The working man’s home,” wrote Simon Patten in 1907, “is crowded with tawdry, unmeaning and useless objects; each pointless object is loved, however, as the mark of superiority and success, and its enjoyment energizes the possessor” (Brown 2003, 33).²⁷ It is this striking conundrum, the relationships between a group of people and everyday objects that are at the same time valued and not valued, that this research begins to examine. These “useless,” “meaningless” objects have been ignored or scorned, have in some cases totally vanished, yet in the nineteenth century were made in vast numbers, desired by people across the industrialising world and displayed proudly in whatever dwellings people with small incomes called “home.”

This project was prompted by my discovery of a lack of research and publication looking specifically at these objects when I was writing my MA dissertation (Mills 2010). In this section I review the background to my research into miniaturisation and the mass-produced miniature within the context of an archaeological/historical investigation. I next I define the principal terms used in my research, before discussing the term “image” in its nineteenth century context. I follow this by

²⁶ Thomas Osler, “glass trinket maker,” in 1824 (quoted by Brown 1980, 180).

²⁷ Simon Patten (1852-1922) was a US economist and academic.

discussing the important materiality of nineteenth-century “images.” I then discuss the place of miniaturisation in the archaeology of the nineteenth century, and how it relates to the study of material culture: I link miniaturisation and mass-produced miniatures with scholarly thinking on things, actants, memories, playthings and the ecology of the home. I end the section by exploring “absence” as it affects my study.

Making sense of miniatures: an archaeological approach

My research project involves and informs archaeology. It looks at artefacts from the past – Judy Attfields’s “rubbish, detritus and discarded things” (Attfield 2000, xv) – which is what archaeologists do, and attempts to ‘make sense’ of those objects. This is a widely-practiced activity: for example The Open University course in material culture is entitled “Making Sense of Things” (Anon nd).

Objects do not start out as *non*-sense. Some scholars claim that objects are a form of language, or at least possess a language that we can share. For example, in 2011 MOMA held an exhibition entitled *Talk to Me: Design and the Communication between People and Objects* (Anon 2011a) while Walter Benjamin famously claimed that things communicate “mental meanings” (Benjamin 1979). The ‘language’ of objects from the past might thus be initially experienced as mute, unintelligible, communicating nonsense (noise? static?) until the archaeologist (or historian) translates it into sense.

‘Making sense’ can also be defined as reducing uncertainty, which fits well with the idea of finding a mysterious object in an archaeological context and becoming more certain of its identification and meaning. Finally, we make sense of something by utilising our senses: as archaeologists we observe it, we touch it, very occasionally we taste and smell it and, rarely, we hear it.²⁸ I paraphrase Steven Feld (Feld 1996, 91) by suggesting that as things make sense, senses make things.

As a historical archaeologist, I concur with Norman Yoffee and Severin Fowles’ claim that my chosen field, in analysing physical remains and not privileging elites, “provides important opportunities for the writing of counternarratives” (Yoffe and Fowles 2011). And in doing this, I am experimenting, as Douglass Bailey and Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal suggest, in creating alternative narratives in alternative ways (Bailey 2008a; Gonzalez-Ruibal 2008).

As a field technician, a “digger,” who spent much of his adult life finding *things*, I align myself with the archaeological posthumanists “who have taken the arguments of Bruno Latour to heart and have devoted themselves to the empowerment of things, to the fight against the tyranny of the subject, and to an archaeology that in no way privileges the Homo sapiens actor of the liberal humanist tradition” (Yoffe and Severin 2011). As such, I also aim to “de-familiarise” the recent past, engaging in a process of challenging and rewriting a little of what we think we know about the last 250 or so years (West 1999, 1). I am using this concept of de-familiarisation to

²⁸ See *The Archaeology of a Ballad*, p 278.

question some of the assumptions and assertions made by archaeologists and others about the class of objects that are the subject of my research.

We tend to believe that people in the past often thought and acted in the same way as us, and, paradoxically, that they didn't. We can demonstrate definitively that nineteenth century people placed brick upon brick to create buildings identifiable as "houses" so familiar that we still echo their designs today. What was going on in the minds of those builders is, however, a mystery. Even when recorded formally at the time, those records were liable to be distorted by many external influences such as class, resistance, taste, politics, economies, religion and so on. We are therefore unreliable curators of the past, whereas objects simply and reliably exist, as material entities, things we can touch or see.

Because archaeologists have no way of knowing what lies beneath the surface until they excavate, and because archaeology is a non-repeatable experiment — "archaeology is destruction" (Wheeler 1954) — I had to embrace a level of risk as I faced the (virtual) surface on and beneath which perhaps lay the material of my research. As discussed in the *Methods* section, I am obeying Douglass Bailey's admonition to "go beyond" archaeology, to *do* rather than talk, perhaps create something unjustifiable and humble, and to stimulate uneasiness in my audience (Bailey 2013).

Paradoxically, Bailey's "unease and imbalance" seems to be the opposite of the certainty and objectivity that making sense of the past might traditionally require,

yet the researcher of Neolithic miniatures advocates the subjective process of being aware of what our senses tell us as we examine these artefacts. He questions more “archaeological” interpretations by looking at, touching, holding and experimenting with manipulating objects (Bailey 2008a) as well as using our relationships with present-day miniatures and what they do to us to try to make sense of prehistoric artefacts (Bailey 2008b). Importantly he encourages his audience to participate in this process, rather than merely being the receivers of data, and he experiments with various ways of sharing his explorations. I attempt a similar engagement by accessing a variety of contemporary source material in my research and include that material as the Appendices of this thesis, so that my readers can share my exploration of relevant texts, images and even music.

Part of “making sense” might be the consideration of the continuity of miniaturisation since prehistoric times as a form of artistic expression. Miniatures are deliberate transformations of reality (physical or imaginary) into something that is intended to be experienced by and change the person who interacts with it. That these objects were mass-produced is, in the period of my study, by the by, for they were usually experienced and were meaningful singly or in small groups on the mantelpieces and shelves of ‘ordinary’ people.

Definitions: slippery meanings and small-scale things

Miniatures form a distinctive and familiar class of material culture, but everyone who researches miniaturisation has at some point to define what it is. Archaeologist

D'arne O'Neill faced this challenge eloquently in her 2010 PhD thesis and is worth quoting at length:

Perhaps defining a miniature is a little like defining time. We all know with absolute certainty what it is until we try to define it and then its meaning seems to slip between our analytical fingers. However, a preliminary working definition of a miniature would need to include the elements of imitation, resizing and symbolism. A miniature has a relationship to a larger object which it imitates or copies as a smaller version of that object. As a result of the resizing, the function of the original object becomes transformed into a symbolic and representational one. This is represented either in a changed form, such as in toys which upon miniaturization become educative or play tools for children, or is maintained symbolically...The exact nature of the representation or symbolism is then provided by the particular cultural context within which the miniature is situated.

(O'Neill 2010)

In looking at models and figurines in prehistoric south-east Europe, Stratos Nanoglou, calling on Douglass Bailey, Bisserka Gaydarska and Lyn Meskell, declares that miniatures were “objects with a specific size, texture, colour, form, etc., which, when produced, used, and deposited in specific contexts, affected experience in particular ways” (Nanoglou 2015, 621). It is the ways in which miniatures affected the experience of those who interacted with them in the nineteenth century that my research explores.

The first challenge is that miniatures are defined by their size. Size as a concept is almost impossible to define since it is always relative: “There are no absolutes: ‘small’ and ‘large’ are relative terms” (Mack 2007, 49).

Definitions

For the purposes of my research, I have defined its principal subjects in the following ways:

- ***Miniaturisation* is the representation of any object – natural, human-made or imaginary – at a smaller scale than its original.**
- ***A miniature* is a small-scale representation of a “life-sized” original, real or imagined, created from any material, including stone, wood, metals, ceramics, plaster of Paris, paper, plastics and glass. The reduction in scale is usually approximate.**
- ***A model* is a miniature that attempts to represent its original as accurately as possible, and at an exact proportional scale.²⁹**
- ***A mass-produced miniature* is a commercially-manufactured artefact made in a series of identical objects and sold for profit.**
- **The *nineteenth century* is the period between 1780 and 1914, sometimes referred to as the “long nineteenth century” and also as the time of the so-called “industrial revolution.”**
- **While miniatures can be manufactured as two- or three-dimensional objects, my research focuses on three-dimensional examples.³⁰**

²⁹ Oliver Pilz suggests that it is not possible to differentiate between miniatures and models at least in ancient Greek examples (Pilz 2011, 16) because some tiny but detailed ships do not replicate full-sized originals.

- The “recent past” is the period from the beginning of industrialisation to yesterday.
- The *present* is that period during which this research was carried out, i.e. 2012-2016.
- A *toy* is an object that is created to be used within play, both by adults and children. Some toys are mass-produced miniatures.
- *Bric-à-brac* is a class of non-utilitarian decorative objects, mostly but not all manufactured, with no set theme, acquired to be displayed in the home. Miniatures are generally included in bric-à-brac.
- A *collection* is created by the acquisition of a number of objects intended to be displayed or curated together, obtained and retained for reasons of sentiment, nostalgia, memory, novelty, display, identity, resistance, connection with childhood (real or imagined), spiritualism, status, aestheticism or investment, rather than the intrinsic function of the objects.

Imaginary miniatures

Susan Stewart implies that miniatures must represent actual or at least tangible originals (Stewart 1993, 60), but miniatures of imaginary originals (Greek gods and goddesses, fairies, angels and so on) seem to be so important that my research suggests that these should stand side by side with those of “real” originals, and that both communicate something of the thinking of their creators and owners. The

³⁰ For example, photographs and prints.

fantastic is aligned with the real and “given ‘life’ by its miniaturization” (Stewart 1993, 60), so can be surely regarded to be as “real” as a miniature figurine of Wesley or a miniature revolver.

There are occasions when an ornament that represents something might be the same size, as or even larger than, its original (e.g. a small bird or insect). It is therefore, by my definition, not a miniature. However it may be displayed amongst and have similar or identical meanings as adjacent miniatures.

Some objects that I am referring to as “miniatures” represent imaginary (so far as I am aware) originals, such as fairies, which have no known size. Is an ornamental fairy smaller than, or larger than a “real” fairy? How tall is a “real” gnome? Garden gnomes, whilst very small imaginary “people,” can be more than 10cm high. Is this smaller than, larger than or the same size as a “real” gnome? I have included these conundrums within the scope of my research, because they may be interpreted in the same way as “true” miniatures.

The people from below: objects of delight in “working-class” contexts

The answers to my research question are based on evidence from what I am calling “working-class” contexts. I have regarded “working class” and “the people from below” as interchangeable generalisations in seeking and collecting the nineteenth-century material that I have analysed, but, though applied to central elements, they are notoriously difficult to define, and perhaps impossible. To attempt to do so is to

step into a quagmire. Even the term “...from below” infers inferiority, ignoring identities that would proudly and stubbornly claim levels of superiority for, for example, the ideal of “the proud working man,” “the artisan” and so on in performances of resistance to established hierarchies. Ironically, Karl Marx used the term “lowest sediment” to describe the poor.³¹

The label “people from below,” though probably first used in the early twentieth century, was invigorated by the title of the article *History from below* written in 1966 by E.P. Thompson (*Times Literary Supplement*, April 7th, 279-80) which resulted in a movement that “saw historians shift their focus from topics such as great men, big wars and political elites to subjects that previously had been neglected like women, children, urban and rural poor, immigrants and ethnic minorities” (Anon 2008a). Its supporters were particularly interested in “popular culture” – the ideas of the mainstream. Jim Sharpe points out that researching “history from below” holds out the promise, and challenge, of recovering the lives of “ordinary” people, lives previously seen as too unimportant and insignificant to merit the attention of historians. Sharpe considers that the principal difficulties in dealing with “history from below,” however, are: that there is a dearth of evidence; that “below” is a meaningless categorisation; that the people from below are usually defined by what they are not; and that resulting narratives can be distorted by their sources (e.g. court cases and the writings of social reformers) (Sharpe 2001, 26-27). Plus, of

³¹ *Capital*, Volume 1 1867.

course, we immediately face the challenge of ascribing meaning to the term “ordinary.”

Margaret Jacob comments on this difficulty, listing the use of “commoners,” “folk,” “the vulgar,” “the lower sort,” “the unlearned,” “the illiterate,” “the excluded,” “the rabble.” She suggests that: “ordinary people were to be ruled over, but [might] strive for political agency.” She also reminds us that “ordinary people are above all conceived as the ‘non...’ – as involving something of a lack, or a weakness, compared to the elite’s gifts and power” (Jacob 2013, 1-2). Jacob was writing about the seventeenth century, but this attitude was commonplace in the nineteenth century, and persists today. It is tempting to use “non...” as a convenient ‘work-around,’ to borrow a computing term, in that those lives explored in this research might be described as “non-middle-class” or “non-elite,” but this would necessitate endless further definitions. A Marxist-influenced definition might be “the dispossessed,” but the majority of those who existed within the industrial revolution earned money, however precariously, because the system, based on capitalism, required and depended on their labour to function and grow.

The problem might be approached from the tangent of “culture from below.” This is a concept “to describe the subculture or counterculture of certain excluded members of society who are economically disenfranchised or deprived of voice according to class, status or economic hierarchy...the concept was used to describe the neighbourhood culture of the working class in Britain, especially when discussed

by Marxist critics and the early “culturalist” school within British cultural studies (Thompson, Hoggart, Williams, Hall et al.)” (Rimstead 2009). This again emphasises the difficulty of defining such a diverse group, (as well as Roxanne Rimstead falling into the trap of invoking the as-yet undefined term “working class”) because while some might have been mute and/or disenfranchised, others, while equally silent, were, for example, successful artisans and entrepreneurs whose positions in hierarchies was simply the result of snobbery (e.g. the distaste among the elite for those involved in “trade”).

“Working class” as E.P. Thompson pointed out in his seminal work *The Making of the English Working Class*, is not an “it”, but rather a self-definition, if not always a conscious one (Thompson 1963, 10). For my project I suggest that it would be counter-productive to constantly hedge around and question the term “working class.” It would not have been the way people at the time described themselves, nor was the term much used by contemporary commentators. There were the industrious classes, those employed to maintain and expand the industrial revolution. And there were the others, the unwaged, the poor. Mayhew calculated that in London there would have been approximately 1.5 million workers, a further 1.5 million part-time workers, and a similar number of people who worked occasionally or were unemployed. Any member of one of these groups could have bought and displayed miniatures that cost at most a few pence and often just a farthing.

For the purposes of my research some sort of label, however crude, needs to be applied to these under-recorded people to differentiate them from the much more accessible and popular ‘middle class’, that of the over-familiar bric-à-brac cluttered parlours, the mythical pantalooned piano legs and the aspidistras. The term “working class” is therefore utilised within this project as a shorthand *collective term*, rather than a closely-defined term, to describe **a group of people for whom the purchase of a non-utilitarian decorative object involved the exchange of a significant fraction of their disposable income**; i.e. the money left over after paying for food, shelter, clothing and healthcare. This implies that the object had sufficient meaning to be valued, to divert money from something more “useful.” It can therefore apply to a fairly well-off artisan to whom a shilling spent on a figurine to show off his/her good taste in the parlour as well as to an impoverished maker of artificial flowers who nevertheless feels she can spare a farthing to cheer her place up.

The objects that are the focus of this research were (and are) part of everyday lives of “ordinary” people. “Ordinary” is another convenient broad-brush description that is widely used, and I have done so occasionally to replace “working class” and avoid monotonous repetition. “Ordinary people” were, of course, far from ordinary. The description is both demeaning and devaluing. Although it may not have been recorded, other than the occasional reference in a census or the like, each “ordinary” person nevertheless lived a life that was unique to them, indeed was extraordinary. I am uncomfortable with “ordinary” because it implies a judgement – suggesting that “ordinary people” were less than extraordinary, were dull, uninteresting, and indeed its dictionary definitions reflect this. The wide use of the label betrays attitudes that have resulted in these individuals being poorly represented in the historical archaeological record, especially in the UK (Mills 2015). In my thesis “ordinary” simply stands in for “working-class.”

Beyond my definition these people are linked by their voicelessness. They probably didn't have time to write much, and weren't encouraged to. That this is a great loss can be demonstrated by a small project in which I was involved:

I recently transcribed an unpublished and forgotten collection of 40 letters in Nottingham Industrial Museum, written in 1973, in which elderly people described "My first day at work," memories of events that occurred at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century. Until I came across them, these hand-written letters had languished in a filing cabinet for 40 years. Almost all the occupations the writers described have long since vanished, and now those writers are dead, their only memorialisation their shaky handwriting and the set of digital files I created.

Our disregard for these scant records is changing, with the advent of projects like *Writing Lives* which promotes the Burnett Collection of Working-Class Autobiography.³² Unless more previously unknown material is discovered, however, the amount of information that has been preserved is finite. In addition, for this project, the usefulness of working-class writing has been limited. Initial examination of a sample of the material indicates that people didn't often record their own possessions in detail. Their biographies are understandably mostly about events and people, rather than things.

History from below cannot awaken the dead. It cannot 'make whole what has been smashed'. But by placing the lives and agency of people most in danger of being forgotten in the centre of our regard, by filling the air with their

³² See <http://www.writinglives.org/category/about>

stories, worries, loves, and tragedies, perhaps history from below can calm the storm blowing out of paradise, and give us a chance to rescue meaningful lives from the ever-growing pile of historical 'debris' and from the silences, forgetting, and revisions of modernity.

(Hitchcock 2013)

That a stirring of Hitchcock's "history from below" is especially necessary in the UK is suggested by a *Google Scholar* search I carried out on 22nd February 2016, using the term "archaeology of working class," which produced only five results that were not located in the USA or Australia in the first 100 returns.

"Images:" what this meant in the nineteenth century

The small decorative miniature objects investigated in this project were commonly called "images" in the nineteenth-century English-speaking world. This was reflected in the street cries of the itinerant sellers of figurines – "Buy my images!" "Images! Very pretty! Very cheap!"³³

In his *Dictionary* of 1785, Samuel Johnson defined "image" as:

1. *Any corporeal representation, generally used of statues; a statue; a picture.*
2. *An idol; a false god.*
3. *A copy; representation; likeness.*
4. *Semblance; show; appearance.*

³³ See Section 7, p 180.

5. An idea; a representation of any thing to the mind; a picture drawn in the fancy.

(Johnson 1785)

The Online Etymological Dictionary adds to this:

C1200 "piece of statuary; artificial representation that looks like a person or thing," from Old French image "image, likeness; figure, drawing, portrait; reflection; statue," earlier imagene (11c), from Latin imaginem (nominative imago) "copy, statue, picture, "figuratively "idea, appearance, " from stem of imitari "to copy, imitate". Meaning "reflection in a mirror" is early 14c. The mental sense was in Latin, and appears in English late 14c. Sense of "public impression" is attested in isolated cases from 1908 but not in common use until its rise in the jargon of advertising and public relations, c 1958

(Online Etymological Dictionary)

According to Raymond Williams the earliest meaning of "image" was "a physical figure or likeness." The word was rooted in senses of idea, of copying and imagination. By the sixteenth century the "physical sense of image" had begun to be accompanied by the today more familiar "mental conception," and Shakespeare certainly used "image" in all its meanings. Recently there has been the advent of the use of "image" to describe what Williams calls "perceived reputation" (Williams 2014, 111-112).

An “image” would once have been more solid than the word would imply today. “Graven images,” for example, were tangible objects, frequently three dimensional, things that could be both disapproved of and worshipped. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and almost certainly earlier, an “image” was most likely to be a three-dimensional representation, usually in miniature. Its relationship to both *imitation* and to *imagine* meant that it could be either an imitation of something real, or something imagined. It is therefore no accident perhaps that these three closely-related words – image, imitation (or representation) and imagination – run as threads woven throughout this project. This may lead to some confusion, after all one can have an image of an “image.”

By the seventeenth century “image” could be something applied, like paint – “he’s the spitting image of his father” doesn’t imply that he’s a three dimensional object, but that his external appearance is very similar to his father’s. That the etymology of image also includes “a reflection in a mirror” is also important and will surface again in these pages, for self-image is hugely significant, as perhaps is borne out by today’s popularity of the “selfie.” It also could explain the popularity of the mirror over the mantelpiece. The growth of photography in the late nineteenth century probably encouraged evolution of “image” to describe exclusively two-dimensional representations.

Since miniature decorative objects could be figurines of humans, busts, small buildings, urns, bowls, “bow pots,” bas-reliefs and medallions, the word “image” served as convenient shorthand. My exploration of “images,” “image-sellers,” and the people who displayed these three dimensional objects on their mantelpieces in the

nineteenth century, demonstrates all the nuances of the word “image” as defined by Johnson. As essentially visual objects, “images” fit comfortably and significantly into a period that experienced, according to Jean-Louis Comolli, a “frenzy of the visible” (Comolli 1980, 121). The popularity of digital imagery in the present leads me to suggest that we are still very much enjoying that “frenzy.”

Nineteenth-century miniature objects as archaeological artefacts

“Archaeology is, of course, the discipline of things par excellence”

(Olsen 2003, 89)

Archaeology might be the discipline of things, as Bjørnar Olsen claims, but it has been selective of which things it focuses on. One of the principal reasons for carrying out this research was the distinct lack of archaeological and historical research specifically discussing the phenomenon of miniaturisation, and even less investigating objects that could be defined as “miniatures” and their significance in nineteenth century archaeological contexts. In the words of Jack Davy “it is rare...that they are meaningfully interrogated, despite recent efforts to engage with them more effectively as objects with the ability to embody complex ideas in ways that influence human society” (Davy 2015). As a ubiquitous phenomenon, one that expanded mightily in the age of mass-production, miniaturisation deserves the attention of those who get closest to the everyday lives of the people of the past, archaeologists (Mills 2015, 243).

Mass-produced ceramic and base metal miniatures have been found on archaeological sites in contexts dating from the nineteenth century to the present

day. These sites are located in Europe and in countries colonised by the Old World. Their distribution is however almost certainly distorted by differing archaeological approaches and priorities. My own research is constrained by my singular working language and the need to focus on “Western” countries. Although many cultures have produced examples of miniaturisation, these were often craft objects rather than factory-manufactured products. Also it is certain that countries where miniatures were manufactured for export to Western markets in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Japan, would yield examples of miniature artefacts in archaeological deposits. These are beyond the scope of my present project.

When nineteenth century artefacts have been written about, few have touched on miniaturisation as an important concept. Archaeologist Paul Mullins has written much about bric-à-brac, of which miniatures formed (and form) a significant element (Mullins 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2011), but he has not tackled “smallness” and the meanings that can be attributed to the ubiquitous phenomenon of small-scale objects representing full-sized originals.³⁴ His justifiable assertion of the ambiguity of meaning of these “prosaic” things in a way avoids having to puzzle over their relationships with people. Eleanor Casella, in her important archaeological investigation at Sandhills, Alderley Edge, probably the best example of someone discussing the meanings of an assemblage of miniature objects in the UK, suggests convincingly that these particular artefacts were complex indicators of social status

³⁴ See p 379.

and individual behaviour (Casella 2004). But again the phenomenon of miniaturisation itself is not examined.

As Judy Attfield points out, to archaeologists, “rubbish, detritus and discarded things” are hugely valuable sources of information (Attfield 2000, xv). It is amongst these that miniature things are found and recorded, but these records tend to focus on description. While formal archaeological reports can be rather dry and dusty, there are some publications that take archaeological description and spin narratives around it.³⁵ But even in these scholarly yet accessible accounts of life in the recent past, miniatures appear to be relegated to a very minor role. These objects were present, and they were present at the heart of the home.

Miniatures of various kinds are found regularly by metal-detectorists and removed from their archaeological contexts. Some in the UK are partly recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database (Portable Antiquities Scheme 2016) but because they are perceived to be of little monetary value, most are rarely properly recorded and merely appear by chance on detectorists’ web sites (see Barford 2016).

Mass-produced miniatures as material culture

Miniature objects would almost certainly been amongst those “tawdry” objects that Simon Patten noticed in a “working man’s home” (Brown 2003, 33). In the last 20

³⁵ See for example Casella 2004; Lukezic 2010; Petchey 1997, 2004, 2007, 2010; Praetzelis and Praetzelis 1992a, 1992b, 2004, 2009; Shackel 2011, Spector 1993; Steedman 1998.

years interdisciplinary academic interest in material culture has grown significantly, and there is a plethora of material discussing and arguing over its theoretical background. In stark contrast, the place of mass-produced miniatures as an element of the material culture of the working-class home has rarely been touched on. Indeed although much has been written about working class people from historical and sociological perspectives, there seems to have been a dearth of research into the relationships between working class people and things.

Amongst archaeologists, Douglass Bailey has brought his alternative approaches to the study of prehistoric figurines and miniaturisation (Bailey 2008a, 2008b, Bailey et al 2010). Interest in miniaturisation is growing: the journal *Pallas* published *The Gods of Small Things* in 2011, and a special *Miniaturization* edition of *World Archaeology* was published in 2015, though both concentrated on prehistoric examples. Those few scholars who, rather than writing about material culture in general, have spent time thinking more deeply and specifically about miniaturisation and miniatures, for example Gaston Bachelard (Bachelard 1969, 1994), Susan Stewart (Stewart 1993) and John Mack (Mack 2007), have looked at these subjects from philosophical and poetic viewpoints.

Bachelard devotes a chapter of his book *The Poetics of Space*, to “Miniature”. He introduces some concepts that occur again in the writing of others referred to in this review, such as the ability of miniatures to “detach [one] from the surrounding world” (Bachelard 1969, 161), to open up other worlds and to concentrate meaning: “values become condensed and enriched in miniature” (Bachelard 1969, 150). He

introduces the idea that we have power over small things “The cleverer I am at miniaturising the world, the better I possess it”. Bachelard introduces the idea that by looking hard at a miniature, giving it “attention”, more detail is revealed (Bachelard 1969, 159). Perhaps this is where the study of things in literature and archaeology produce differing results. Close examination of a mantelpiece miniature usually reveals a *lack* of detail. Making something smaller necessarily entails leaving out detail, introducing abstraction. It means that what is omitted is as important as what is included, because that forces the viewer to use their imagination, the importance of which Bachelard does stress. Bachelard is perhaps conflating miniatures and models. Many miniatures are quite crude representations because, I believe, their function is to provide the basis of an idea rather than a realistic, finely detailed small-scale copy.

“Detail” could also refer to the small-scale physical characteristics of the surface of an object – i.e. chips, brush marks, flaws, wear, the *minutiae* of textures. These add material information (a fingerprint for example, or a manufacturing technique) but don’t tell us much about the *meaning* of that object.

Scale

It is important to consider scale when thinking about miniaturisation. The etymology of “miniature”, which refers to the red pigment, *minium*, used by those creating tiny images within and around the initial letters of illuminated manuscripts (Pilz 2011, 11), implies a reduced scale – the image is a scaled-down representation of something, a scene, a landscape, or an animal, squeezed into a limited space.

Bachelard includes the microscopic in “Miniature,” but I would claim that, however small it is, a microscopic object is still full-sized. An amoeba is not a miniature, nor is it a small-scale version of something, it is simply a full-sized, very small, amoeba. The microscope merely renders its image gigantic. It would, in theory, be possible to have a miniature representation of an amoeba.

Perhaps the representation of microscopic things at large scales, gigantic objects (for example models in museums and electron micrographs) that are often awe-inspiring, entails the same effect as miniaturisation, but in reverse. Just as miniaturisation can bring us close to something big, so the gigantic can bring us close to, say, a bacterium. This mixing of miniaturisation and gigantism is also apparent when Bachelard mentions that Thomas Hardy wrote about moss representing a pine wood (Bachelard 1969, 161). Here the moss isn’t regarded as a miniature representation of a pine wood. The writer imagines and transforms the moss into a large-scale, gigantic version. A “miniature pine wood” would be just that, tiny representations of trees, rather like miniature scenery on a model railway. Miniaturisation is *physically* irreversible. It is possible to reduce a gigantic object to its original size or even create a miniature of it. Enlarging a miniature back to its original size or creating a giant version of it would expose its lack of detail.

The potent miniature

John Mack’s work, *The Art of Small Things*, focuses almost entirely on museum-curated objects that belonged to elites in the distant past, as one would expect, perhaps, from a British Museum publication. An art historian, Mack provides

valuable insights into people's relationships with three-dimensional solid objects, rather than the rather literary approach of Bachelard. He discusses the inaccessible, but nevertheless imagined, interiors of miniature things, especially buildings (Mack 2007, 207). He writes of the "potency" of the miniature, and our use of our own bodies to measure their size. Mack accepts that "the smaller something is, the more child-like it seems to be" despite stressing that it is adults who make "the material things of childhood" (Mack 2007, 144) (*and see below*). Perhaps this implies that "child-like" is an adult construction, built from miniature objects that adults feel are appropriate for the creation of an imagined childhood and a nostalgia for something that didn't exist.

Susan Stewart also introduces connections between miniaturisation and childhood. She posits, for example, that the invention of printing coincided with the invention of childhood (1993, 43). Others, however, (for example Howard Chudacoff, 2007) suggest that the "invention" of childhood occurred somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century, long after Gutenberg and Caxton. The idea of childhood may well have been encouraged by the nineteenth century industrialisation of printing and the increased affordability of illustrated books depicting this new phenomenon (which at first was mostly limited to middle- and upper-class families).

Books may have also spread the childhood narratives that miniaturisation inspired in adult writers. Stewart also claims that "the toy" (i.e. miniature things) lends itself to private fantasy more than social play. The fantasy inherent in a miniature toy is an adult one (Stewart 1993, 57). *Thomas the Tank Engine* was the invention of the very

adult Reverend W.D. Awdry (Awdry 1946) and adults purchase these toys, feeling nostalgia for a technology that only those born well before 1967 would have experienced in anything other than a museum or on a preserved railway.³⁶ The continuation of that fantasy involves a supply of adult-created objects that are presented to a child with appropriate identification (“here’s a signal/truck/carriage/crane/track” etc.). Just as the invention of “childhood” and the increase in solitary play were mid-nineteenth-century developments (Chudacoff 2007) so perhaps were the miniature props, created by adults, that supported them.

That miniatures concentrate meaning, are meaning-rich, is at the centre of much of Stewart’s thinking. For example Stewart considers that souvenirs, while expanding our experience, contract the world (Stewart 1993, xii). She notes that the reduced size of a miniature doesn’t reduce its significance (Stewart 1993, 43). Souvenirs are often mass-produced miniatures and I would argue that miniatures, too, contract and concentrate both the real world and imagined worlds.

Stewart writes that “the miniature does not attach itself to lived historical time”. Miniatures are very much associated with memory, with the memento, with the souvenir and with the celebrity, all of which are attached to moments in historical time which are fossilised by the miniature representation. Time can also be miniaturised: model railway enthusiasts run timetables appropriately speeded up to match the scale of their layouts, while time seems to pass more quickly in a miniaturised environment (Stewart 1993, 66).

³⁶ See above, *The Key*, page 27.

While Stewart regards storytelling as a removal from everyday life (Stewart 1993, 9), I would alternatively suggest that the stories told by miniatures are part of everyday life, reflect it, remember it in the past and help to create it in the present and future. Many miniatures were (and are) tied to specific moments or periods of everyday life, as in the representations of celebrities whose marketability lasts only as long as they are (in)famous.

Miniatures as things

Human life consists of ceaseless and varied interaction among people and myriad kinds of things

(Schiffer 1999, 2)

Miniatures are both objects and things. Objects – lumpen, static – lurk, invisible, underground, where we archaeologists haven't dug them up yet. When we do, they are transformed by our attention (Bachelard 1969, 159) into things, "vivid entities" in political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett's words, that expand beyond both their contexts and semiotics (Bennett 2009, 26). However because both "object" and "thing" are used interchangeably by writers and researchers, it is difficult to avoid mixing the two terms.

So important are Schiffer's interactions between people and things that archaeologist Christopher Witmore claims that "humanity begins with things" (Witmore 2007, 549). According to Bill Brown, however, we are accustomed to

looking *through* things to get at what they tell us about ourselves rather than looking at things themselves, examining their “thingness” (Brown 2004, 4). While I want to look through miniatures at what they can tell me about the past in which they existed before they were discarded, I also want to consider miniatures as things rather than just objects because I agree with Bennett that “we experience [thing-power] every day” (Bennett 2009, 25).

Things with power

Non-archaeologists have occasionally recognised that miniature objects appear to possess a level of agency that could be described as power. John Mack suggests that: “to render ordinary things on an ever-reducing scale is...to render them more powerful in visual terms” (Mack 2007, 6). This makes miniatures doubly-powerful, and perhaps goes some way to explaining why they are so much part of our lives, because they add the power of miniaturisation to their already-present thing-power.

The concept of thing-power has been persuasively promoted by Jane Bennett. She defines thing-power as “the queer vibrancy of allegedly “inanimate” or “inorganic” matter: its power to contest, compete, or ally with the individual and collective intentions, drives or impetuses of persons” (Bennett 2009, 24) and attempts to show that things are “actants rather than objects” (Bennett 2009, 31).

Stratos Nanoglou considers that “miniatures act upon us, before we can act, before we have the ability to act, and thus they set the terms by which action is possible before we can make a choice. Accordingly objects, miniatures, representations,

figurines, pots, along with human bodies, animal bodies, etc., set the terms by which someone is recognised” (Nanoglou 2015, 621).

In a later lecture (2011) Jane Bennett wonders if thing-power might explain the “allure” of things that demand to be acquired, that can be regarded as part of oneself, that can take over and that can provide comfort. Although in the lecture Bennett was referring to the extreme behaviour of hoarders, I suggest that “thing-power” might explain some of the attraction for apparently useless miniature objects of doubtful quality and ambiguous meaning that people accumulated in small collections on their mantelpieces and shelves. These objects may provide comfort and, as Ball suggests, company, as well as being objects to which we have a deep attachment (Ball 1967, 450). Those made of resistant materials, may outlive us, giving us a sense of immortality, if merely by association, perhaps as part of the objects’ material memories (see below). Those made of more fragile material may vanish, reflecting loss of memory and absence.

The social life of miniatures

Jane Bennett’s contention that “thing-power” is dynamic, involving change, “the ability to shape-shift” (Bennett 2009, 28) echoes the changing values of miniatures that are at first commodified, then desired, then acquired, then treasured, then discarded, only to be re-commodified and once again desired and acquired. This is another example of “the social life of things”, a concept pioneered by Arjun Appadurai, who wrote of the “circularity” and “trajectory” of things, and “things-in-

motion” (Appadurai 1986, 1, 5) a significant departure from the rather static form-and-function anthropological approach to objects.

Supporting Kenneth Haltman’s assertion that things are “culturally potent” (Haltman 2000, 2), the relationships between humans and things are seemingly endlessly fascinating, as can be seen from the popularity of TV shows such as *The Antiques Roadshow*, *Hoarders*, *Extreme Clutter*, *Storage Wars*, *Seriously Amazing Objects* and others, radio shows and linked exhibitions such as the British Museum/BBC’s *A History of the World in 100 Objects* and the Smithsonian’s *101 Objects that made America* and a plethora of popular books inspired by the success of *Longitude* (Sobel 1995).³⁷ All these entertainments involve gaze and performance, with the objects (which often include miniatures) performing on the same stage as the celebrity hosts—if the objects weren’t playing their part, there would be no show (Hunt 1993, 297). The performance is “material culture.”

Though they accept that artefacts can communicate meaning, Wilkie and Bartoy are doubtful that what archaeologists study can reveal “consciousness or self-identification” (Wilkie and Bartoy 2000, 756). I am going to suggest that miniatures *are* more revealing and do in fact tell us at least a little of what the people who bought them were thinking. If we discover a nineteenth-century ceramic figurine we know objectively that someone in the past experienced its form in a manner very close to ours. They would have seen its colour and shape and felt its texture and weight, and may have agreed with our identification of what it represented.

³⁷ While miniatures appear early in the timeline, none from the recent past are thought worthy of inclusion.

Furthermore, more subjectively, we can share at least some of the *double-entendre* associated with a fairing, or the jingoism of a figurine of Nelson, the patriotic feelings attached to a figurine of Victoria, the celebrity-worship of a figurine of the actress Madame Vestris or the cricketer George Parr.³⁸ The process becomes more challenging, but equally rewarding, when we are presented with a miniature cat or a representation of a Venus. Interpretation is likely to be less accurate than identification, but we potentially access more “soft” information than what is revealed by, say, the discovery of a utilitarian artefact such as a cooking pot. I apply Lubar and Kingery’s term, “un-self-conscious creations”, to miniatures in their being free from the restrictions of contemporary *mores*, though still communicating cultural and social thinking (Lubar and Kingery 1993, xvi).

Jacques Maquet claims that the meaning of an object is established by the group for whom it is relevant rather than its designer or commissioner (Maquet 1993, 35).

Archaeologist Paul Mullins also considers that whatever the intrinsic meaning of a miniature might have been, its owners will have appropriated it and attached their own meaning(s) to it. The excavated artefact’s meaning is ambiguous (Mullins 2000).

The capitalist manufacturers (and therefore commissioners and designers) of a miniature ornament had to be sure that the object would sell in order to make money. This meant that they had to produce objects that would appeal to a significant number of people, would be desired and would reflect popular tastes.

The objects therefore had to have some sort of intrinsic designed content/meaning

³⁸ Fairings were low-cost, usually crude and often bawdy ceramic figures given as prizes at funfairs. For Madame Vestris, see page 270.

to elicit that desire, even though the individual purchaser might then almost certainly either add to that meaning or subvert it.

Symmetry

*When people engage with the miniature, they gain access to other worlds
and alternative realities*

(Boric and Robb 2008, 10)

The idea that people “engage” with miniature things implies a degree of symmetry. We are, according to Christopher Witmore, entangled with things, so mixed up with them that in his words “humans and non-humans should not be regarded as ontologically distinct, as detached and separated entities, *a priori*” (Witmore 2007, 546). Miniatures are things, and things, it seems, are more than dull objects—indeed they can be “sublime actants” (Bennett 2009, 25). The idea of a symmetrical archaeology, where things, though different, can be regarded as non-oppositional “beings” with humans, plants and other animals has been promoted by Michael Shanks (Shanks 2007) and Bjørnar Olsen amongst others (Olsen 2003, 88). This concept is important in the study of archaeological artefacts closely linked to people’s thinking. “Archaeology is a representative act”, and archaeologists witness and speak for the past (Shanks 2007, 591)

Unlike William Marquardt, who considers agency to be “the purposeful activity of individual human beings” (Marquardt 1992,104), Bruno Latour suggests that things both human and nonhuman can display agency and be actants, can do things, make

a difference and produce effects (Bennett 2009, 33 n1). I would argue that the miniatures I study are indeed actants: they have intrinsic agency in that they alter the behaviour of those who interact with them.

Alfred Gell extends the concept to “art objects” (which I suggest could include mass-produced miniatures) theorising that they are “the equivalent of persons, or more precisely, social agents” (Gell 1998, 7), an agent being a person or thing that “causes events to happen” (Gell 1998, 16). Building on Gell’s assertion that people “attribute intentions and awareness to objects” (Gell 1998, 17) it can be hypothesized that humans are part of a circular relationship, almost a partnership, with miniatures. A simple view would be that while being aware that they are lumps of fired clay, cast metal or moulded plastic, they nevertheless cause us to invest them with “life.” Their “thing power” encourages us to animate them, and as a result the objects acquire a secondary agency that again influences our behaviour. As manman writes: “When the working-class interior is the object of the writer's desire, its multifarious bric-a-brac gleams and glitters in this way...the objects...ranged on the mantelpiece and towering up in the shelves of the open cupboard...curve themselves outwards (or inwards)...present their interior as well as their exterior to the world” (Steedman 1998, 25).

Gell hesitates to consider that a child’s doll is a “self-sufficient agent” but is a manifestation of the child’s own agency and that what we experience is the “co-presence” of an agent (Gell 1998, 20). However it might be claimed that the doll is actually an actant, and that the child reacted to the doll’s intrinsic agency by giving it

“life” and treating it as if it were a miniature person. The doll participates in a symmetrical relationship, in ways that are often so powerful that we sometimes desire to relive them as adults. “In [a child’s doll] and through it a person is made into a subject” (Levi-Strauss 1966, 23).

Miniatures as memories

The miniature typifies the structure of memory, of childhood, and ultimately of narrative’s secondary (and at the same time causal) relation to history

(Stewart 1993, 171)

Susan Stewart’s assertion that miniaturisation materialises memory, childhood and history is an important one. In the past, one use of the term “memory” was to describe the wear and tear suffered by an object or clothing. Scuffs, wrinkles and chips memorialised past events (Attfield 2000, 145). Judy Attfield goes on to assert that interest in “the material culture of memory” has been growing as archaeologists and historians realise “the importance of the meaning of things in relation to time” (Ibid).

Sharing the mantelpiece or the shelf with other objects, I suggest that miniatures are often mnemonic objects (deliberately or unconsciously chosen). They trigger memories, are surrogate memories and also require memories to be meaningful. Susan Stewart quotes Bergson, who claimed that perception actively requires memory (Stewart 1999, 17). Objects help us to recollect, they “stimulate remembering, not only through the deployed mnemonics of public monuments or

mantelpiece souvenirs, but also by the serendipitous encounter, bringing back experiences which otherwise would have remained dormant” (Kwint 1999, 2). I would add that, importantly, they can be the stuff of memories, as is shown by their function in the “memory boxes” that function to replace the absent memories of those suffering from dementia and Alzheimer’s disease (Wegerer 2014).

According to Nicolette Mackovicky, Walter Benjamin “regarded not only memory, but also history, as materialized in objects” (Mackovicky 2007, 291). The importance of material memories is a constant throughout my research, and I echo Mackovicky in seeking not only what people remember “but *how* they remember and the relation between the two” (Mackovicky 2007, 291, my emphasis).

It has been suggested that figurines, miniatures, stimulate thought and particularly thinking about oneself in the world (Boric and Robb 2008, 10). That thinking process is complex, but I agree with Boric and Robb that because miniaturisation forces the designer to omit detail and introduce abstraction it prompts the viewer to use their imagination to fill gaps (Ibid). What is absent is often memory, intangible thoughts from the past, some that belong to us, the viewer, more that belong to the possessor, for whom the miniature is a memory, and some that the object brings with it (its content or agency).

Miniatures are effective tools for both possessing and sharing memory because we are in control. Miniaturisation exaggerates the viewer—we are by default gigantically powerful when compared to even the fiercest, wildest miniature (Cartier

and Lew 2006, 95). Miniatures are also powerful because they have latency, allowing us, as controllable elements of a partnership, to invoke our own memories. We, the all-powerful viewer, are free to add the miniature to our own individual narratives that, according to Stewart, are linked to “nostalgic versions of childhood and history” and result in a “diminutive, and thereby manipulatable, version of experience” (Stewart 1993, 69).

Because we can instantly grasp the “totality” of the miniature, Claude Levi-Strauss considered them to be easier to comprehend “less formidable, simpler” than what they represent (Cartier and Lew 2006, 95). Douglass Bailey suggests that what is absent from a miniature is more important than what is present, adding to the object’s role as “visual illusion” (Bailey 2008b). As, until the moment in the present when we look at a miniature, our lives exist in the past and as memories, they join Susan Pearce’s objects that “tell the stories of our lives” (Pearce 1992, 47). In analysing and interpreting these objects, we can use memories as “a key to unlocking the cultural belief” that is embedded in them (Prown 2000, 18).

Commemoration, an important element of memory, was and is hugely important, and many miniatures commemorated significant events, either in the lives of those who owned them or more widely, such as coronations, heroes and battles. After pointing out that one in ten decorative objects in “plebeian households” were “commemorative plates, mugs and jugs marking national and family events” Kwint suggests that these objects acted as a sort of concentrated commemoration for people whose lives left little time for contemplation (Kwint, 1999, 5). Like many

other objects, such as cars and computers, with which we develop relationships, because of this link with memory miniatures can be suffused with emotional value (Newitz 2007, 90).

Finally, Stewart writes that: “the miniature typifies the structure of memory, of childhood, and ultimately of narrative’s secondary (and at the same time causal) relation to history” and she explains that what a miniature represents is always something in the past: “the miniature comes into the chain of signification at a remove: there is no original miniature; there is only the thing in ‘itself,’ which has already been erased, which has disappeared from this scene of arriving-too-late” (Stewart 1993, 171).

Miniatures as playthings

a toy is simply the starting point of narrative

(Stewart 1993, 47)

It seems natural to associate small things with small people. Archaeologists, rather lazily, do it all the time—a recent example (Figure 39) is from the (excellent) *Christchurch Uncovered* blog (Garland 2013). The “narrative” that Stewart suggests is inspired by a “toy” is, however, not a simple one. The frequently-evoked and appealing narratives of grubby children playing with toys in the mud and dust of the nineteenth century are comforting fantasies. “For many nineteenth century children, particularly those from poor homes or rural areas, commercially produced

toys were virtually unknown luxuries. This still remained the case by the end of the century even after three decades of rising prosperity” (Brown 1980, 181).

Figure 39: “The presence of children”. Section of *Christchurch Uncovered* blog.
<http://blog.underoverarch.co.nz/2013/11/the-difficulties-of-dating-3-the-bigger-picture/>

“At present, archaeologists tend to catalog all miniature objects as “child-related,” writes Stacey Camp. She goes on to warn that: “assuming that small objects are naturally “children’s” toys poses a twofold danger. First, it projects a monolithic idea of scale and size onto artifacts. Second, and more importantly, miniature objects were often used to discipline marginalized subjects by reformers and colonizers. Pintsize tea sets, house-keeping equipment and porcelain dolls were used as disciplining agents through which “improper” behavior could be corrected and refashioned” (Camp 2008, 10).

When dealing with small things from the past, there are many examples of a confused mix of cuteness, syrupy sentimentality and adult nostalgia. For example a 2007 Williamsburg Foundation exhibition, *A child’s eye view*, explored “how children

re-create the adult world from their own perspective through play and toys” but demonstrated the all-too-common confused thinking around the meanings of these artefacts. Its introduction stated that “dollhouses, toy trains and other playthings bring back fond memories of childhood.” These memories are possessed by adults, but the “exhibit designers kept their young guests in mind when creating this display. Objects have been installed at the viewing height of a 10-year-old child.” A ten-year-old in 2009 would have no memories of these objects. And nostalgia must have been painful for those adults with bad backs. (Molina 2009).

There is also evidence that children didn’t regard “toys” in the same ways as adults. Majewski and Schiffer suggest that in the nineteenth century miniature tea sets were designed with the latest designs to inculcate the fashion into the minds of children (Majewski and Schiffer 2001, 45). I wonder if, since it was adults buying the tea sets, whether, as happens today, the designs appealed more to them than to the children. Christopher Geist quotes Jane Carson who, in her book *Colonial Virginians at Play*, claims that: “second to their dolls, the favorite toy of little girls was the tea set.” This toy offered the colonial girl an opportunity to play at the enormously popular adult pastime, the tea ceremony, which had captivated Americans from the wealthiest to the lower classes” (Geist 2008). Laurie Wilkie raises the likelihood that although adults may have intended that miniatures would combine pleasure and education in the ways of the adult world, children often imposed their own agendas on these objects (Wilkie 2000, 110). It is also unlikely that many working-class families had the opportunity or inclination to indulge in tea ceremonies.

Archaeologist Bly Straube, admits that “It’s very hard to tease out the presence of children just looking at the material culture...we find things like toys, but what we would call toys...to the culture they would be things that could be traded to the Indians or little amusements for adults” (Hunter 2009). I suggest that dolls’ limbs represent an example of Straube’s “little amusements for adults.” They are a frequent find on a wide variety of archaeological sites. Paige Peyton, researching the ghost towns of Utah for her PhD, found that “it is not uncommon to find toys/miniatures in this site type/vintage [abandoned mining towns in Utah (roughly 1870s-1920s)], even though they are focused on mining. The most common of these is the porcelain/bisque dolls leg...go figure” (Peyton 2010, *pers comm*). Miniatures, including ceramic dolls’ legs, have also been found associated with mining settlements on the other side of the world in Otago, New Zealand, though here, whilst early camps were exclusively male, Peter Petchey has identified documentary evidence that indicates some children were present in second-generation settlements. (Petchey 2010, *pers comm*). This, together with the finding of miniatures in pioneering locations (e.g. Majewski and Noble 1999, 299) reminds us that these objects will be present in the archaeology of even the most down-to-earth settlements, and that their meanings might be more complicated than being merely playthings.

It is easy for archaeologists to fall into the presence-of-children trap. In an investigation of Minneapolis “slums,” though from documentary evidence “no children were noted in the Bridgehead Site” John McCarthy still went on to write that those artefacts he identified as child-related were “among the most evocative,

creating a strong link to the past residents of the project area.” He used this assumption to postulate that life in the area may not have been as bad as previously thought, presumably imaging children happily playing amongst the mostly-industrialised contexts (McCarthy 2001, 149).). The “toys” found in working environments could have been owned by adults as mementos, keepsakes, trifles, charms or for the sake of nostalgia. In reporting finds from the Los Penasquitos ranch house, California, Christina Mirsky insists that toys were evidence of children, despite oral history that stated that “the children...did not have dolls or toys of any kind” (Mirsky 1993, 179).

This use of the presence-of-children to cast a happier light on archaeological contexts also occurs in Australia, where Grace Karskens uses “a great collection of manufactured toys, many of fine and unusual quality: dainty tea sets, pretty dolls with glass eyes, lead figures such as horses, soldiers, boats and carriages, playing pieces from games, ceramic figurines and child-sized jewellery” (Karskens 2001, 76) to suggest that in The Rocks “slum”: “children were not regarded by working people as ‘non-human’ and unimportant at all; clearly they held modern cultural notions of childhood as a phase separate from adult life, a time of play and indulgence as well as education.” Jenny Porter and Asa Ferrier enlarge on “the presence of dolls, marbles, toys, and writing slates” in Melbourne’s Casselden Place to conjure up “both solitary and group play,” educational activities and “moderate indulgence” of children (Porter and Ferrier 2006, 388, 389, 392).

However one of the themes running through my research is adult relationships with “child-related” things, and, while questioning her apparent low opinion of “curiosity,” I echo Sally Crawford’s passing on of Joanna Derevenski’s warning that “the identification of objects as playthings in fact only serves to move them away from the mainstream discussion of the other artefacts into a different (lesser, marginal) status: ‘its identification as a toy relegates the significance of the artefact to the level of a curiosity’” (Crawford 2009, 59). So “the possibility that any miniature artefact found in an archaeological context, even when associated with children, had adult, non-toy functions, has to be given serious consideration” (Crawford 2009, 61). Kathryn Karp supports this: “adults use toys to play with themselves, to demonstrate their own status, to bond with or coerce children, to encourage desired behaviours. Some “adult” toys are identical to “children’s” toys” (Karp 2009, 120).

Perhaps archaeologists are too dismissive of what these objects might tell us. Anne Yentch and Mary Beaudry complain that “often [toys] are given short shrift as archaeologists try to put together the “big picture,” using artifacts to delineate the path of ‘man’s” progression and its impact on cultural form” (Yentsch and Beaudry 1992, 427). We need to re-examine our analytical attitudes to small things. Crawford suggests that toys, rather than just mere objects, are fluid, context-related concepts, which makes “current attempts to classify objects as toys on the basis of their shape, size, cost or assumed function redundant” (Crawford 2009, 62). Even if a “toy” has begun existence as something intended for children it often joins Jane Bennett’s “shape-shifters” in becoming a curated object of memory, writes

Crawford. “Artefacts made to be toys may turn into relics or memorials to childhoods, and, as such, become part of the material culture of the adult world” (Crawford 2009, 63), while Karp notes that “adults utilize toys to demonstrate their own status through their children’s belongings” (Karp 2009, 120).

None of this is to deny that children may have been present, and may have played with the objects. In the nineteenth century, however, the concept of “childhood” as a separate entity from “adulthood” was only just developing, as Charles Orser points out. “It also appears that we are unsure about the transition from childhood to adulthood as shown by archaeology rather than historical sources, especially amongst poorer people” (Orser 1996). Howard Chudacoff argues that “age only becomes a meaningful form of classification at the end of the nineteenth century” (Sanchez-Eppler 2005, xxxi). Chudacoff states that in the nineteenth century “toy” meant something frivolous or inconsequential: “an object that could amuse an adult or child but was not exclusively reserved for children” “...dolls, carved soldiers, animal figurine, miniature houses...mostly intended for ornamental purposes and belonged to families of means”(Chudacoff 2007, p 26).

Miniatures in the ecology of the home

To lose a home is to lose a private museum of memory, identity and creative appropriation

(Hecht 2001, 123)

A display of miniature objects, what Grace Karskens describes as a “great array of sentimental figurines of poodles, cottages, lambs, ladies, and angels sheltering little children under their wings” (Karskens 2001, 76), things with concentrated agency, would be important elements in the private museum that Anat Hecht suggests was the home. Other than in impersonal locations such as museums and galleries, most miniatures of the past were, and are, displayed, or if hidden, cherished, in homes, or at least places where people live.

Whilst many of these locations can be defined as traditional “households,” others are more complex. Miniatures have come from brothels and bordellos (e.g. Sandpoint, ID), taverns (e.g. Bladensburg OH, Christchurch New Zealand, Detroit MI, Dauphin PA, Half Way House NV. Le Breton Flats, ON), isolated ranches (e.g. Ranchos de Taos Plaza, NM, Kinchega NSW) and mining camps (e.g. Otago, New Zealand, Buxton IA), places not so readily identified as “homes.” Normally displayed indoors, miniatures are sometimes located outside, as garden ornaments, and, less commonly, they are placed on graves.³⁹ Some miniatures, particularly those made from base metals, were meant to be carried on the person.

For Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi the home is more than just a shelter. It is a place where familiar, tangible things act to organise and steer the lives of their owners (Csikszentmihalyi 1993, 25). Those possessions were, in Deborah Cohen’s words, endowed with moral and artistic qualities. If, as Cohen claims, the nineteenth century middle classes were closely associated with their belongings, were using

³⁹ See page 356.

possessions to define their individuality and status in a world that was becoming more uniform, I suggest that what some called the “industrious classes” would have also used objects to reflect identity (Cohen 2006, xi).

The symbolic home

Is to live in a place to take possession of it?

(Perec 1997, 24)

One of the reasons that miniatures were and are popular is that a lot of symbols can be displayed in a small space (Mullins 2000). They were also easily portable, so at a time when many impoverished people frequently moved between cheap rented properties, could carry the idea of “home” from place to place. It is likely that a few familiar, much-loved ornaments helped to make each temporary dwelling a home, providing the security of “possession.” Susan Digby believes that “placement” of what she calls “meaning-rich” objects, with which their owners associate memories, acts to establish identity within a space, making it “their place” (Digby 2006, 184).

Deborah Cohen writes that there is a common belief that “our homes reflect our personalities” which is part of our inheritance of “the materialistic world the Victorians made.” However, she continues, although we recognise their “apparently insatiable, and to our eyes quixotic, demand for things” we haven’t really explained why “they stuff[ed] their houses full of objects” (Cohen 2006, x). This lack of understanding is even more glaring when we attempt to look back at the working classes. While in a middle-class area “a typical parlor overflowed with store-bought, mass-produced objects... shelves and small stands overloaded with bric-à-brac and

purchased mementos. (Cohen 1982, 293), we have little information on the parallel material culture of the “lower” classes. As Jesse Lemisch points out, “The history of the powerless, the inarticulate, the poor has not yet begun to be written because they have been treated no more fairly by historians than they have been treated by their contemporaries” (quoted by Ascher 1974, 331).

“Precious, useless objects”

Diana Maltz mentions Octavia Hill’s account of the woman she is attempting to help who worries that her “bits of things” will look worse in better lighting (Maltz 2006, 18). While Maltz suggests that the owner is holding her ground in contrast to Hills’ claim that she was not aspiring to higher standards, for me her reaction speaks of a wish to display those “bits of things” to their best advantage, since they are a reflection of her self-identity. Her neighbours probably felt the same about their own bits of things. For we learn from unthinking contemporary writers that working-class people had “precious, useless objects,” treasures that they caused middle-class do-gooders much frustration because they would rather the “poor” used the money to purchase more utilitarian items (Malz 2006, 211).

Nicolette Mackovicky, citing Burikova and Parrot, states that “recent work on those who occupy a marginal role within the family home or are forced to live within an institutional framework show how crucial personal objects are to the maintenance of personal identity in surroundings that represent the agency of others” (Mackovicky 2007, 289). Asa Briggs would agree, writing that “...people who owned very few things of permanence could hold them especially dear” (Briggs 2003, 3).

The popular concept of the parlour as a place of external display is now frequently questioned. “Only in exceptional circumstances do neighbours actually see the contents of each other’s homes” (Clarke 2001, 30). Indeed for working-class people, pressured by “the scrutiny and intervention of State, government and social reformers” (Ibid, 24) the home more often than not became a place of refuge. Working-class housing in the nineteenth century was often regimented and patriarchal, with rules and regulations. Small things would allow people to “appropriate, interpret and generate agency through their standardized spaces” (Clarke 2001, 29). As Alison Clarke continues, “the interior worlds of these households, although they may remain to all intents and purposes physically private, are used as projections of very real relations with the larger external world” (Clarke 2001, 29).

“Gaston Bachelard [argued] that the chief benefit of a house was its function as a place to dream of wide horizons through its protection of the daydreamer” (Digby 2006, 175). In the lives of those whose opportunities were severely curtailed and who had precious little spare time in which to daydream, those wide horizons could be represented by a few small things on the mantelpiece. Judy Attfield suggests that material culture is “a mediating agency—the means through which individuals relate to each other within a household and beyond it to the world at large” (Attfield 2000, 153).

Absence: the archaeology of nineteenth-century working-class homes

We remain quite ignorant about the daily lives of large sections of the population (and especially their material culture) outside the writings of social commentators

(Matthews 1999, 157)

Keith Matthews, researching “subcultures and marginalized social groups” in Chester (Matthews 1999, 158), refers to the “wounds” inflicted on that city by recent redevelopment (Ibid, 155). In most cities around the world, thousands of working-class homes that once housed urban working classes were destroyed in large-scale clearance of “slums” (for example Leeds, Figure 40).

Figure 40: “Slum clearance” of back-to-back houses in Leeds. Note the “vertical archaeology” – traces of demolished staircases left in plaster on the remaining walls.

<http://www.rogermayne.com/urbanlandscape/urbanlandscape3b.html>

Figure 41 shows a densely-populated area of Nottingham that was destroyed, unrecorded, by the construction, in a vast cutting, of Grand Central Railway's Nottingham Victoria station (Figure 42), itself destroyed only 50 years later, to be replaced by a shopping mall. This scenario could be replicated many times in all industrialised parts of the world.

Figure 41: Working-class housing in Nottingham before the construction of Nottingham Victoria Station (Digimap).

Figure 42: Working-class housing obliterated by Nottingham Victoria station (Digimap).

This wholesale destruction is similar to that which archaeologist Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal suggests is a marker of “supermodernity” (Gonzalez-Ruibal 2008, 247).

Gonzalez-Ruibal restricts supermodernity to the twentieth century, but I would claim that the enormous changes and destruction, often repeated, that accompanied the Industrial Revolution, mean that the term could be expanded include the nineteenth century. Middle- and upper-class homes were rarely destroyed in such large numbers, even by wartime bombing (which was usually concentrated on industrial areas, where nearby closely-packed working-class housing became collateral damage) and usually survive to this day.

Contexts of absence

The archaeology of the nineteenth century, especially in urban areas, is therefore almost by default that of working-class dwelling and associated buildings and features such as privies and rubbish pits. It was this disappearance, and the creation of so many of what Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal calls “abject” contexts (Gonzalez-Ruibal 2008, 248) as well as what might be called *contexts of absence*, that enables me to confidently claim that the archaeological contexts I access during my research are “working-class.”

Although most working-class homes went unrecorded it is nevertheless possible to suggest that they were immersed in material culture. Figure 43, from the German-language version of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, is a mid-nineteenth-century representation of the interiors of New York dwellings that were considered unfit to be lived in. Intended to show the horrors of tenement life (it depicted

“Murder Alley”) the illustration shows some 58 rooms with fireplaces, stoves and mantelpieces, on which stand a variety of objects. The rooms also include clocks, pictures and furniture. These are not wealthy homes, but they show significant amounts of material possessions.⁴⁰



Figure 43: Die Tenement-hauser in New-York. Mid nineteenth century. New York Historical Society. *Frank Leslie's Illustrierte Zeitung* (New York Historical Society) (For detail see Figure 61).

Sadly, until the 1990s archaeologists in the UK paid scant regard to physical remains of the nineteenth century. My own excavation experience in the 1960s, 70s and 80s agrees with that of Keith Matthews, who asserted in 1999 that many archaeologists at the turn of the millennium still disregarded and destroyed nineteenth and early twentieth century deposits that they assumed were simply “disturbed” or “overburden” (Matthews 1999, 157). As a result our knowledge of the everyday lives

⁴⁰ The materiality of working-class life is explored further below, p 131.

and material culture of working-class people is often limited to “ the writings of social commentators” (Matthews 1999, 157 and Mather 2013). However recent archaeological work in London (Jeffries and Hicks 2004, Jeffries 2007), York (Harrison 2011), Alderley Edge (Casella 2004, 2010), Chester (Matthews 1999) Birmingham and Manchester has shown that the archaeology of the recent past can richly enhance our knowledge of this period.

In the New World the value of the archaeology of the recent past has been more readily accepted (Matthews 1999, 156), perhaps because in colonised countries archaeology is more clearly divisible into pre-contact and post-contact periods, the archaeology of indigenous peoples and that of life since colonisation. Even here though, the archaeology of the nineteenth century was under-valued until relatively recently. For example, Neal Ferris points out that it wasn’t until the growth of cultural resource management in the 1980s that nineteenth-century domestic sites in Ontario changed from “being dismissed as irrelevant to research and so much ‘recent disturbance,’ to being a legitimate part of the Ontario archaeological record, worthy of research, conservation effort and proponent expense” (Ferris 2009, 3). In the US, as late as 1997, some archaeologists regarded nineteenth century sites to have “minimal research potential” (Anzalone, Stumpf and McManamon, quoted by Baugher and Klein, 2001, 3). There was often a circularity of argument, with sites being regarded of little importance because little was know about them, therefore they were not investigated, which resulted in a lack of knowledge and thus their apparent lack of import. Susan Lawrence and Peter Davies were still able to write, in the introduction to their 2011 book *An Archaeology of Australia since 1788*, that the

existence of post-colonial archaeology surprised most people (Lawrence and Davies 2011, 1).

Absence: the fragile materiality of “images”

Who knows but what the plaster of Paris images now peddled out by Italians will be unearthed by some archaeologist 4000 years hence and gravely called idols worshipped in this day and age of the world?

(The Saline County Journal, Kansas, May 26th 1892)

When I began this project I assumed that I would be principally focusing on familiar material recorded in archaeological excavations or in curated collections. As my research continued, and on coming across the Plumtree Court mantelpiece, it became apparent that there was a class of decorative object that, because it was significantly less resistant than fired ceramics, had not survived post-discard archaeological conditions. Realising I had stumbled across an area of material culture into which little research had been carried out, I further investigated these miniature objects, which had been manufactured from plaster of Paris.

Sadly, the optimism of the anonymous writer in *The Saline County Journal* was misplaced, and these objects have not lasted for 100 years, let alone 4,000. I think we can assume that plaster of Paris objects were rarely if ever worshipped as “idols,” but the objects were important enough at the time to “survive” virtually in nineteenth-century illustrations, artworks, popular writing, newspapers, poetry and

song. Indeed this contrasted with a marked absence of contemporary information on ceramic material.

The narratives “spoken” by plaster of Paris decorative objects, the manner of the manufacture and distribution and their place in domestic contexts came to dominate my study of nineteenth-century domestic material culture. As a result, the concepts of miniaturisation and the miniatures discussed in this section should be assumed to apply to plaster of Paris miniatures as much as to those ceramic and base metal miniatures.⁴¹ Those examples of miniatures recorded and commented on in previously-published work are, however, almost without exception made of the more resistant materials. It is this previous non-appearance of a significant class of objects that makes my research both exciting and important.

⁴¹ And by extension stone, ivory, bone and wood miniature artefacts.

4: Methods

An archaeologist works on what is left of the past, and explores what might be done with the past in the present

(Michael Shanks interviewed by Bailey 2006)

Working with what is left of the past

It has been exciting and fascinating to work with what is left of the particular past that is the focus of this project, but there have been interesting methodological challenges. Forced to rely on objects discarded by the (usually) anonymous and long-dead, archaeologists can be said to have to *interrogate objects*, and this activity is the basis for the methods associated with this research. In this project, the majority of the artefacts I have interrogated, instead of being neatly labelled in brown cardboard boxes in museum storerooms or spotlit in display cases, have been *virtual*. They often exist only as images or texts, many of them digital. I am fortunate to be carry out my research in an age when the virtual is accessible, is searchable, when collections are being digitised and I can spend as much online time as I like in a museum, a library or a newspaper archive in Australia, Russia, New York City or London, as I can in Manchester or Leeds, and discover links between the objects in their online databases.

It is worth summarising the archaeological methods that are relevant to this research and how I have adapted them. Archaeological fieldwork entails a backwards search through material that has accumulated over time. Each moment of deposition, be it a layer of dust, the discard of an object or the fall of a wall, immediately follows and overlays the previous moment, and itself is followed by and overlain by the next event—another layer of dust or, say, the digging of a cess-pit. Events that happen later in time are never interposed beneath those that preceded them.⁴² This process results in *stratification*. The most reliable stratification is *sealed* by a deposit that can be securely dated, such as the tarmac of a car park or the destruction caused by a fire. This event is called a *terminus ante quem*, and all the stratification buried beneath it dates from before the moment the sealing deposit was formed. The tarmac would also form a *terminus post quem* for any deposits that formed after it was laid.

Archaeological investigation, especially, but not only when dealing with the recent past, can nevertheless be carried out where there is no stratification, for example on the surface of a ghost town or in disturbed deposits such as ploughsoil. Recent archaeological investigations have included the “excavation” (i.e. the recording using archaeological techniques) of a Transit van (Myers 2007), the camp site abandoned at the end of the Burning Man festival (White 2013), a long-running and much-copied “garbology” project (Rathje and Murphy 1992), an abruptly-

⁴² This holds true unless they are disturbed by later activity. The contents of a pit can be excavated and redeposited, a process that will mix together objects of different dates.

abandoned council house (Buchli and Lucas 2001) and the materiality of homeless people (Kiddey and Schofield 2011).

The vertical wall of a building can be an archaeological 'site', as can an old door, a painting or photograph and a charity shop.⁴³ Importantly for my study, so can a room. Objects scattered in a stratified deposit, on the surface of a ghost town or abandoned lot or marking the surface of a wall or weather-beaten door all have a spatial and temporal relationship with each other, their context and us, the observer/recorder.

Two-dimensional archaeology

Objects within the same stratified deposit, physically and temporally, form an *assemblage*. While this might be within a three-dimensional soil layer, it can also be a "deposit" depicted in the two-dimensional stratigraphy of a painting or photograph that capture assemblages frozen together in time. It is therefore possible to 'excavate' an image in an archaeological sense, as opposed to the analytical approach of an art historian.

Archaeology is generally associated with "ruins" or "sites." These are routinely investigated by the destructive process of excavation, and the identification and analysis of material remains – things – in order to invent a narrative that fits the excavated clues as closely as possible. In this project I am also creating archaeological narratives around sets of clues provided by objects that exist in two

⁴³ I regard a charity shop as an archaeological site, in that it is a place of discard, though it consists of dynamic, ever-changing assemblages (Mills 2014).

dimensions – in illustrations, artworks and photographs and on paper. Most of these resources have been accessed digitally, via the two dimensions of my computer display panel. I am engaging in what space junk archaeologist Alice Gorman calls “the archaeology of not-quite-there” (Gorman 2016). Asking the question “how do you analyse something you can’t touch?” Gorman’s blog entry discusses the investigation of stellar objects, but I can purloin and adapt her definition to describe what I am doing: **the archaeology of not-quite-there involves the use of historical and proxy data in order to make hypotheses about what lies beyond our reach, in the past.**

There are some basic differences between excavation in the field and excavation of an image or text:

- The “sites” are not destroyed by my investigation of them.
- The artefacts may no longer exist – they may have been recorded at the time, as drawings, paintings, photographs or written descriptions but since then have been lost or destroyed.
- The objects may never have existed in exactly the form in which I am studying them – they may have been artists’ or illustrators’ inventive, inaccurate or “artistic” representations or may only have survived as written descriptions intended to be creative, emotive or evocative.
- Even though the “sites” are two-dimensional, elements in images may be obscured or hidden, i.e. only partially visible, “behind” other elements, or be

poorly lit or given little detail by the artist/photographer, or be incomplete, e.g. at the very edge of an image.

- I am forced to use only the information communicated within the “frame” of the text or image. I cannot “dig” beyond the edge of the “site,” as I might have done in a three-dimensional excavation.

Although at first the differences between this and traditional excavation may seem to be major, in fact many archaeological sites are interpreted principally from texts and illustrations – the excavation records – long after the trenches have been filled in and the physical remains obliterated. Although archaeologists will create interpretations whilst in the field, indeed may have to in order to excavate effectively, these will be based on incomplete data, and a final narrative will be created only after further examination and exploration of all the collected evidence.

Some/many archaeological sites are interpreted or reinterpreted from the reported material only, and it is a benchmark of archaeological practice that the final report should be exhaustive enough to allow interpretation of the site from that source alone. One long-refilled site on which I worked as a schoolboy volunteer – Stone Chapel, in Kent – has since been interpreted and reinterpreted seven times, mostly using archived data, and may yet be reinterpreted again (Irvine 1874; Hawley 1931; Meates 1968; Fletcher and Meates 1969; Taylor and Yonge 1981; Philp 1983; Wilkinson 2008).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For these citations see Wilkinson 2008, 6.

Some types of field archaeology do not destroy the evidence they collect. Perhaps the best example is industrial archaeology, which tends to record standing structures with limited, if any, excavation that may merely remove accumulated debris or vegetation rather than stratigraphy.

In excavating an image I don't destroy it. Unlike an archaeological site I can go back later and revisit my initial interpretation as many times as I wish. However my attention to the image could be described as "activation." Up to the moment I arrive at it, just as in an excavation, the image has been static, invisible (at least to me), hidden in a closed book, a locked-away archive, an un-accessed database, an unvisited gallery. The images in *Appendix I* and the texts in *Appendices II and III* will have been glanced at by other viewers, readers and researchers since they were created. A few have been utilised in previous scholarly work, but my methodology has activated the information they contain in a comprehensive manner.

Kirsten Jarrett summarises her thoughts on "broadening the material horizons of archaeology" in *her Notes of an Antiquary* blog (2016). She writes that her primary interest is "surface" materiality, and that material "derived from neither field survey or excavation, might be usefully analysed using archaeological approaches." She points out that traditionally and popularly archaeology has been associated with excavation – indeed, in order to qualify my methodology I have used the term "excavation" to describe my examination and analysis of the Plumtree Court mantelpiece and other images. Her assertion that the archaeological recording of late nineteenth and early twentieth century contexts would still be generally

greeted with derision is perhaps now a relic of the recent past, since although the (in)famous excavation of a Transit van might still raise a few eyebrows amongst those unfamiliar with the project, the terms “historical archaeology,” “contemporary archaeology” and “contemporary past” no longer cause much gritting of teeth, though there is still debate as to their definitions. Perhaps now the most vigorous debates are whether contemporary archaeology really exists as a definable sub-set of archaeology (risking a lively discussion like that still sometimes occurring over “historical archaeology”), or if archaeology simply covers everything that can be defined as “past.” Using her basic definition that archaeology is: “[the] study of the human past through material remains, with regard to context, and reference to change over time and space,” Jarrett suggests that “archaeologists might fruitfully examine any material for which space-time relationships are known” (Jarrett 2016).

Going beyond archaeology

In the recent past, just as today, there was a “vast array of things that testify to the importance of the sense of unique difference and individuality which activate people’s sense of agency” (Attfield 2000, xiii). In exploring just one class of that vast array my research methodologies have followed Judy Attfield’s approach of “tacking back and forth between rhetorical questions, theoretical devices, items taken from the personal minutiae of everyday life and illustrative case studies” (Ibid).

Archaeologist Douglass Bailey, an academic researching Neolithic miniatures, has written and spoken of his approaches to archaeology and “art” in ways that could almost be used as a manifesto for my research (Bailey 2006, 2010, 2013). I suggest that mass-produced miniatures, purely decorative and mediating objects, can be called “art”. Bailey suggests, in a recent online presentation (Figure 44), that though the conjunction of art and archaeology is a “fertile place” it is also “fetid” (Bailey 2013). He doesn’t really explain his use of the description “foetid” (his presentation slide uses the US spelling), but for me this idea of a combination of fertility and decay conjures up a compost heap, a malodorous place that nevertheless enriches and encourages growth.

Bailey claims that archaeologists limit ourselves in a number of ways: by staying within our disciplinary boundaries, by focusing on justifying our work, by being arrogant, by talking when we should be doing, by not embracing risk (putting ourselves in difficult places), by not stimulating unease and imbalance—initiators and inspirations for creativity—by not letting go. He feels that archaeologists need to “embrace vulnerability” and that we need to “go beyond”.

This not the place to discuss Bailey’s ideas, with which I am in mostly in agreement, in depth. As he exhorts, I got on with doing, rather than “talking”. It is worth wondering, however, that while his suggestion that we get our audiences “to do the work” might be a good one, it requires a modicum of scene-setting, a few rules, a little guidance, perhaps a compass, otherwise the participants may get lost. This is true of any intellectual challenge, just as it is of any game. I argue that Bailey’s

experimentation, a contemporary extension of the more traditional field of ‘experimental archaeology’ (e.g. Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966), may, with a modicum of guidance, reveal more about people who were themselves experimenting, or at least were part of the great experiment that was the nineteenth century.



Figure 44: Screenshot from Douglass Bailey’s video presentation, *Going beyond and letting go: Non-archaeological art and non-artistic archaeology*. (Vimeo 2013).

<https://vimeo.com/66192443>

Bailey provides some examples of “vulnerabilities”. The first is his book, co-authored with Andrew Cochran and Jean Zambelli, *Unearthed: a Comparative Study of Jōmon Dogū and Neolithic Figurines* (2010), which, although introducing an exhibition, dispenses with the traditional catalogue approach to disassemble the collection, placing objects, images and texts (academic and informal) together in different, sometimes challenging, sometimes amusing, sometimes mischievous combinations and contexts.

The second example is a yet-to-be-published book chapter that mimics life in that several strands run through its 20 pages, some continuous, others fragmentary, the pages representing/reconstructing the passing of time. Thirdly he introduces another in press article that is driven textually and graphically by the concept of cutting, inspired by the archaeological process of slicing through earth, stratigraphy and time. These examples are far removed from the standard archaeological publication based on excavation, recording, interpretation and so on. Rather than merely telling, Bailey questions, explores and experiments. Because this is risky process, not everything 'works.' For example, perhaps the background sounds of a present-day Romanian village, complete with goats and tractors, takes away more than it adds to a conference presentation.

My research therefore involved the integrated use of two broad, porous, open-ended and interwoven sets of research methods:

(a) **Serendipitous research:** combining theoretical and data mining activities together with "field work." This involves interrogating mass-produced miniatures and the contexts in which they are found in the virtual world via digitised contemporary illustrations, artworks, caricatures, cartoons, photographs, newspaper reports, magazine articles, non-fiction and fictional writing, poetry and song lyrics (Fine and Deegan 1996; Robert et al 2009, 26).

(b) **Exploration:** involving different ways of looking at mass-produced miniatures in the recent past, including narratives such as those that start and end my thesis.

Interrogating the object

*Through a single object, we can connect to a moment in time, a person's life,
a set of values and beliefs*

(Lubar and Kendrick 2001)

My methods (summarised in Table 1) combine elements of McClung Fleming (1982) together with Steven Lubar and Kathleen Kendrick (2001). As a convenient method of discussing these activities, I shall adopt the approach suggested by Jules Prown (1982), quite early in the recent history of the study of material culture. An art historian, he lists “description,” “content,” “deduction,” “sensory engagement,” “intellectual engagement,” “emotional response,” “speculation”, the “creation of theories and hypotheses” and a “programme of research” as steps toward making sense of objects.

Prown instructs that these activities should be carried out in sequence, description → deduction → speculation. This is appropriate for curated objects ‘frozen’ in collections, galleries and museums, but in the dynamic and unrepeatabe environment of archaeology I suggest that they can be utilised in any order without affecting the rigour of exploring material culture. As a field archaeologist I should normally touch and react to an object before describing it, with some instant speculation as to what it was and what it was doing there occurring before I placed it in the finds tray. The next action I carry out is often influenced by that initial informal analysis: do I dig downwards, sideways, do I stop or do I leap up and shout “Look what I’ve found!”? For example, if I posited, based on experience, that the

artefact was an iron nail, I have to decide quickly if there are likely to be more nails in the same context that might indicate a structure.

Table 1: Interrogating the object: summary of methods and outcomes.

Activity	Potential results and/or outcomes	Interrogating the object
Identification	What is it?	Standard archaeological descriptive approaches
	When was it made?	
	Where is it from?	
	What is it made of?	
	Who made it?	
	How was it used?	
Evaluation	Agency	Content
	Digging deep	Deep description
	Capturing moments	Objects as memories
Cultural analysis	Identity	Deduction Intellectual engagement
	Connecting people	
	Changes	
	Point of departure	
Interpretation	Revelations	Sensory engagement
	Stories	Emotional response
	'Meanings'	Experimentation
	Opening up the world beyond the artefact	Speculation
	("passageways to history")	'Encounters'

Description:

It would be possible to subject each and every mass-produced miniature object to a detailed process of description, but what would result would merely be a catalogue, something that has already been done by collectors and curators (e.g. Pugh 1988).

Field archaeologists, collectors and curators often end their examination and recording of miniatures at this stage, and very few researchers have looked beyond.

Content:

Mass-produced miniatures are rich in content by design. However the accumulation of challenges to my research begins at this stage:

Intrinsic content:

A miniature will have been provided with content by its designer and manufacturer.

Sometimes this is seemingly obvious: a miniature cat can be seen as manufactured to appeal to consumers' fondness for cats (as pets/companions for example).

However a cat miniature may also be designed to be "cute" and sentimental (exaggerated eyes, sentimental pose). Or purely decorative. Or an example of the designer's and/or manufacturer's skills.

Extrinsic content:

Each owner of the miniature cat will attach his or her own content to the object.

They may prefer an ornamental cat to the real thing. They may feel a cat possesses desirable character traits (warmth, affection). The miniature may remind them of a long deceased pet. It may simply be decorative. The owner might collect nothing but cat figurines.⁴⁵ They may believe that the figurine has investment value.

Deduction:

Having avoided assigning much if any content, archaeologists commonly deduce that the function of a mass-produced miniature falls into a restricted set of categories, for example indicating the presence of children, or status, or ethnic

⁴⁵ See Appendix I, p 282.

origin. I shall be re-examining and questioning some of these deductions in the hope of encouraging more critical responses to the finding of these objects.

Sensory engagement:

In the Ironbridge Gorge Museum stands a marvellously hideous (in my opinion, see *emotional response* below) cast-iron hall table supported by four iron greyhounds. The nose of each hound has been polished by the caresses of thousands of visitors. Thankfully, the museum has decided to permit this physical involvement with what would otherwise be an easily ignored exhibit. It is a perfect example of our ability to invest life in an inanimate object: a real life dog enjoys having its nose stroked, so we stroke the nose of a cast iron representation. It is also a splendid example of our need to touch, a need discouraged by most curatorial practices.

Miniatures were *intended* to evoke sensory responses, usually visual, but also touch, but these are rarely reported by archaeologists (but see Brown 2015). We are left to append our own experiences, our own “material memories” to our understanding of the object. As Susan Stewart suggests (Stewart 1999), our senses are a vital part of the appreciation and understanding of objects, as well as the creation of material memories. The experience of being larger than an object, in comparing it with our own size, could be regarded as a sensory one.

Ironically, an ornament may be designed to rely on visual impact rather than touch, but nevertheless communicate texture (fur, textiles, flesh, hair) that we have to conjure up, even if the object is made from a completely different and unresponsive

material such as plaster of Paris or porcelain. We look at a miniature cat and can imagine, automatically, or “somatically” as Stewart puts it in the same paper, that it has fur and a yielding body.

Paradoxically, the perceived value of a miniature may be increased by our being forbidden to touch it. One of my respondents told me: “My mother had a miniature stove but I was never allowed to play with it.” Not being allowed to touch is probably a common memory of childhood, one that taught us all sorts of value judgments.

Intellectual engagement:

What miniatures were and what they did beyond merely sitting on a mantelpiece are the drivers of my research. I describe their materiality (for example plaster of Paris or ceramics) and then continue to explore their roles as characters in an intellectual performance.

Emotional response:

Archaeologists rarely share what they *feel* about objects, what emotions, if any, the objects create, other than occasionally finding a particular artefact “evocative” (often/usually something they identify as belonging to a child), often without continuing to report what the object evokes.⁴⁶ The objects were intended to provoke an emotional response, if only one of admiration. It is useful to know that a particular observer finds an object tasteful or distasteful, because those emotions

⁴⁶ But see Mills 2015 and other authors in Brown et al 2015. Also Attfield 2000.

can colour any subsequent analysis. Bric-à-brac has been much criticised both in the past and in the present and archaeologists have, inadvertently and unconsciously perhaps, been infected with attitudes towards miniatures based more on snobbery or class than honest gut emotional responses.

Speculation:

I engage in speculation in *Section 2, Encounters with Miniatures* above, page 24 and *Section 13, Two Stories* below p 468.

Theories/hypotheses:

Umberto Eco wrote: "One cannot do theoretical research without having the courage to put forward a theory" (Eco 1975, 7). I have put forward a number of theories/hypotheses and what Douglass Bailey calls "vulnerabilities" (*see above*). Perhaps the most important is my belief that miniatures were/are not just sentimental curios but instead, because of their close relationships with people at the heart of their homes, encapsulate and communicate narratives, memories and amounts of information out of all proportion with their size. They are, I am convinced, what archaeologist Robert Ascher calls "superartefacts" (Ascher 1974, 13).⁴⁷ Superartefacts are objects that are ubiquitous, or which yield significant insights, or act as portals, or are so familiar as to be almost unnoticed. Ascher uses the automobile, the Coke bottle, Stonehenge and the iron nail as examples. I am convinced that miniature things are just as archaeologically, historically and culturally important to our understanding of humans. Ascher suggests that

⁴⁷ Ascher used the US spelling "superartifacts."

superartefacts would provide the sort of valuable cultural information useful in a time capsule. Again, miniature objects would do the same.

Programme of research:

In his interview with Douglass Bailey, Michael Shanks repeated the words at the beginning of this chapter, then added: “Archaeologists WORK on what is left of the past, to MAKE all sorts of things (in discursive structures): things like papers, books, narratives, exhibitions, classes, web sites, museums, collections. So the boundaries are to do with our savviness, and our tactical and strategic goals with respect to the currency of the past in the present” (Michael Shanks interviewed by Bailey 2006). It is as much as possible of this mix that my project aims to access and enhance.

5: Green parrots and spotted cats

The archaeology of a mantelpiece

Artefacts do not lie, but it is often difficult to get them to give up the truth.

Even the most mundane object can embody political controversy or particular sets of social and cultural values

(Graves-Brown 2015, vii)

The Working-Class Context

It is important firstly to discuss perceptions and misconceptions of working-class life in the nineteenth century, paying particular attention to people Howard Jacobsen realised tended to be “unnoticed” and whose everyday existence was (and is) often dismissed as “tedious and trivial” (Jacobsen 2008, 21). It is also necessary to locate gaps in knowledge and understanding and to attempt to explain why they have arisen. Using contemporary illustrations it is possible look into working-class domestic interiors and suggest what they can tell us.

In 1980, Lizabeth Cohen was moved to write that: “While in recent years historians have pursued the often elusive lives of working people, they have almost totally ignored domestic settings, and the material culture within them, as sources” (Cohen 1980, 752). Although since 1980 the situation has improved, scholars have mostly ignored, overlooked and generally neglected the *materiality* of nineteenth century

“working people.” When they do look at objects they often do so within the narrow confines of literary studies.⁴⁸

Like Cohen, I believe that “workers who left no private written words speak to us through the artifacts in their homes” (Cohen 1980, 753). Cohen’s subsequent essay based on her 1980 paper, in Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach’s 1986 book *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, is introduced as “a kind of visual archaeology, in which photographs are used to resurrect real physical environments that once existed, but no longer do” (Cohen 1986, 261), which closely parallels my own approach. That the essay is in a collection of papers written around vernacular *architecture* underlines the still prevalent interest in the homes of working people as terraces of bricks and mortar rather than terraces of living people.

At the start of the industrial revolution the acquisition of small decorative objects was generally restricted to elites. They were craft objects, created singly or in small numbers, and as a result were of high monetary value. Come the nineteenth century, the combined growth of industrialisation, along with mass production, the emergence of mass workforces, the move of populations from rural to urban communities and increased incomes led to the expansion of cities and of worker housing, with concomitant demand for the trappings of domesticity.

⁴⁸ For example Cale et al 2010; Boehm 2012 and a number of conferences such as “Victorian Things: Nineteenth-Century Literature and Material Culture” 2012 and “Objects of Research: The Material Turn in Nineteenth-Century Literary Studies” 2016.

While most of a nineteenth-century household's requirements were utilitarian – furniture, pots and pans and the like – there arose, probably from the very beginning, a desire, if not a *need*, to “decorate” the home. This can be seen in contemporary depictions of even the poorest homes, where flaking plaster or peeling wallpaper more often than not bears a calendar, a picture torn from a magazine or a religious tract.

As the nineteenth century continued, the conditions of the impoverished in cities attracted much almost ghoulish and voyeuristic interest, and a number of commentators recorded the horrors they witnessed amongst the insanitary alleys, “rookeries” and courts of industrial cities. The works of writers such as Friedrich Engels, Charles Dickens and Henry Mayhew have become well known, and perhaps over-utilised, as records of what everyday life was like for the “industrious classes” in the nineteenth century. This is understandable, because there has been little exploration of the materiality of the lives of the hundreds of thousands of working-class households who *didn't* live in the foetid squalor familiar from popular accounts. As Francis Thompson pointed out in *The Rise of Respectable Society*: “...four fifths or nine tenths of the people *did not live in slum conditions*” (Thompson 1988, 181; my emphasis). In addition, there have been few attempts to link nineteenth-century working-class lives across continents and oceans.

This section examines a material aspect of domestic life that, I suggest, reflects working-class thinking and attitudes. I will suggest that knowing more about the ornaments – “useless things” – displayed in homes will enable us to envision

working-class lives that differed markedly from the Dickensian *tropes* that currently result from an online search for information about the “Victorian working class,” that world of slums, gloomy Dore prints and “filth.”⁴⁹

Although the nineteenth century was the beginning of an age of mass communication, working-class people created few records of their lives, and those few that did, rarely focused on materiality. Despite the existence of vast archives recording a literate society, we still know little about the everyday lives of millions of people who lived in the nineteenth century.

Because we encounter its surviving material culture in museums across the world (Batchelor 1994, 139) we are, we believe, very familiar with nineteenth-century working-class life. Stark, dark black and white etchings, Gustav Doré’s gloomy engravings (Figure 45) and gloomy greyscale photographs are reproduced over and over. Dickens, Mayhew, Engels and others are quoted repeatedly. We’ve visited “Victorian parlour” reconstructions, most of them middle-class but some purporting to represent the homes of workers, are a popular display in museums throughout the westernised world.

⁴⁹ “Useless things:” Brown 2003; Maltz 2006, 2011; Schwarzbach 2001 and others.

**Figure 45: A much-reproduced engraving; *Over London, by Rail*, 1872. Gustav Doré.
<http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/objects/display?id=6845>**

As a result our perception is that everyone seemed to be poor, wretched, starving, weak, immoral, diseased, dying or criminal. Skeletal people dwelt in crumbling, collapsing hovels and slept on heaps of rags. Half-naked, grubby children wandered cold, filthy, streets, selling watercress or sweeping crossings, or suffocated in chimney stacks; permanently-foggy streets were awash with raw sewage, patrolled by beggars, cripples, prostitutes, pickpockets, Jack the Ripper and Bow Street Runners.

This is, however, a pinhole glimpse of the recent past. For example, if all the reconstructed “Victorian parlours” in the world were added together, the total would probably be less than 100. The same images of the same rooms appear repeatedly in books and online and are repeatedly used as teaching resources. This

means that our view of millions of homes that existed around the world in the nineteenth century is based on a very small number of mostly middle-class reconstructions, which themselves are created from whatever material is held by the museum and based on the knowledge and approaches of individual curators, again a tiny minority.

A bias towards towards the middle classes is understandable, because descriptions of the contents of their parlours are more common in contemporary literature, more photographs were taken of middle-class interiors, and more of their material culture, especially standing structures, has survived. If at all, working class interiors were usually described negatively in the writings of social commentators and activists (see Ginn 2006). The vast bulk of working class homes went unrecorded. This has resulted in the mournful (to me) emptiness, both of possessions and emotions, of most lower-class interior reconstructions (Figure 46). They were poor, we understand, therefore logically they didn't own anything significant.

If we examine the interiors of present-day impoverished homes they are likely to contain plenty of stuff, as Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas found when they carried out an archaeological investigation of a British council house in 1997 (Buchli and Lucas 2001, 158). It is cheap and cheerful stuff, or stuff gathered as part of a survival process, stuff that is "unnoticed" (see Jacobsen 2009) except, perhaps, by an archaeologist. I demonstrate below that the same was true of the nineteenth century working class homes.



Figure 46: Mantelpiece in “Working-class home,” Abbey House Museum, Leeds. Note the miniature tripod cauldron (see p 402 and Figure 194). Photograph, the author.

What “ordinary” people owned can also be gauged from what they lost. The proceedings of the Old Bailey include lists of what people were accused of stealing from the homes of those who lived in places like Plumtree Court, indeed in Plumtree Court. The proceedings also include approximate values. A number of relevant cases are included in Appendix III.

In his book *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (1976) Henry Glassie proposed what could act as at least partly as a manifesto for this study:

A method based on the document is prejudiced; fated to neglect the majority of people, for they were non-literate and, within the boundaries of literacy, to neglect the majority of people, for they did not write. Even today in societies of almost universal literacy, it is a rare soul who bequeaths to future historians a written account of his thought... How can you study a society if you attend only to the expressions of a small and deviant class within the whole?

(Glassie 1976, 8)

On the other hand, working class people were certainly written about, and some of these records feature importantly in my research. Most of these broad-brush records focus on living conditions of the poorest and tend to focus on a perceived absence of material culture rather than its presence.

A challenge of this study is not only that the recent past of working people is under-recorded, but also that their material culture, in the form of assemblages of archaeological “finds,” has either been destroyed, or has been transformed into objects that have little if any connection with their past, that have been extracted from their life histories and “curated”, rather like butterflies – netted, killed and pinned down in meaningless rows. “Our knowledge is thin and faulty,” explained museum curator Jette Sandahl in a recent lecture. “We have torn these objects out of their contexts. We have to reconnect to our knowledge that is in the objects and to the living memories that they still carry” (Lubar 2016, pers comm).

Working-class materiality—the parlour problem

Working-class homes, if illustrated at all, were routinely depicted as almost unfurnished, with just a bottle or two on rickety shelves and mantelpieces and a pile of rags on the floor (e.g. Figure 47). Contrast this with the bright colours in Figure 68.



A Clerkenwell Interior.

Figure 47: A Clerkenwell Interior. (Godwin 1854, vii).

Perhaps the archaeology of the recent past adds to this conundrum, because most excavations reveal what is left after what remains above ground has been removed – a jumble of decayed and crumbling below-ground structures, cellars and basements, which are by definition damp and gloomy and, when lived in, were the homes of the poorest (see Figure 62 and Figure 63). Contemporary commentators tended to report and exaggerate the most extreme conditions that supported whatever cause they were espousing (Ginn 2006, 191).

Museum curators face a number of dilemmas. They have a limited collection of artefacts on which to draw. Few of the collected objects will have originated in the same or known contexts but will usually be from a large number of unrelated sources. They often have to create a display within an unsuitable environment,

usually a building/room that is either (a) recently designed and constructed or (b) is not a working-class structure. An example is the Castle Museum in York, which includes working-class exhibits created inside what was once a prison. This is naturally poorly lit, has thick stone walls and a generally oppressive atmosphere. Another example is the Abbey House museum in Leeds (Figure 46 and Figure 177), where working-class rooms are displayed in a dimly-lit series of small, low-ceilinged rooms in what began as a C12th gatehouse, though much altered.

The reconstructions of “Victorian” parlours in so many museums are myths, as fictional as “Sherlock Holmes’ house” in Baker Street, London. As discussed by Robert Ascher in his 1974 paper *Tin*Can Archaeology*, they are chance comings together of objects from museum storage rooms. Like many myths (Santa Claus, fairies and so on) they have influenced our thinking to the point that we are able instantly to visualise them. This doesn’t make them any the more “true.”

Fictional realities

Writers, especially journalists and novelists, aimed to entertain and grip and hold the reader, and nineteenth-century working-class people were represented in their works as ‘characters’ who suited the story. They were aiming at a middle-class readership to who “the poor” were horribly fascinating at a time when touring the poorest districts – “slumming” – became a tourist attraction and general entertainment for the better-off. Novelists like Dickens used this marketing technique to such a degree that “Dickensian” entered the lexicon (Hudson 2011). Marx, Engels, Dickens and others wrote about working-class people with pens

sharpened by their individual political stances, and in Dickens' case, with a deliberate use of imagination and an admitted lack of direct experience (Spector 1984, 365). Those who illustrated the times also drew with pencils similarly pointed. Although Dickens and other nineteenth century writers were attempting to describe reality, or reality as they experienced it, and indeed in some cases used their writing to attempt to focus attention on inequality, injustice and cruelty, they found that they needed to enhance, to "colour," often-mundane reality.

There is no doubt that extreme poverty existed in the nineteenth century, and that the examples reported by social commentators and activists such as Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth were based on intensive and detailed observation. Many working-class people did indeed live in appalling conditions, especially the "poor", the homeless, the unemployed, old, sick, drunk, mentally-ill, criminal and feckless. But as mentioned above, the vast majority lived relatively comfortable lives. Geoff Ginn quotes W.W. How, The Bishop Suffragen for East London, who wrote in 1888: "the vast majority of inhabitants live quiet respectable lives of hard work" (Ginn 2006, 193).

There were, therefore, many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, who, whilst not living in the lap of luxury, did accumulate possessions and, importantly for my research, decorative objects. It is instructive to recognise the stark and striking contrast between the text and the accompanying illustrations of *The Daily News Handbook of the Sweated Industries Exhibition of 1909*. Whereas the writers describe sweated workers living in "wretched" conditions, the accompanying images

show workers, whilst often crammed into a room that often also acts as kitchen or bedroom (or both), against backgrounds that include pictures and arrays of objects arranged for display on shelves, dressers and mantelpieces (for example, Figure 48).



Figure 48: Artificial flower makers. 1909. Illustration from the *Handbook of the Sweated Industries Exhibition* (Mudie-Smith 1906).

These photographs, taken presumably in the very early years of the twentieth century, nevertheless appear typically “Victorian.” It might be argued that by this time workers were better off than their nineteenth-century forbears, but the text of the report seems to suggest that this was not so; artificial flower making, the activity illustrated in Figure 48, was “one of the worst paid” (Mudie-Smith 1906, 30). The illustrations mostly show people working in rooms that were often crowded (though not “cluttered” in the middle-class sense; these were simply small dwellings, often single-roomed, with everything squeezed into them). It is possible to make out belongings set against backgrounds of patterned wallpapers, draped mantelpieces, framed pictures displayed china and much similar materiality. In one, of a doll

maker, stands a 'Number 14' bentwood chair, the twin of which stands a few feet away from me as I write this (Mudie-Smith 1906, 85). While modern readers might leap on and indeed relish the handbook's description of squalor and poverty amongst home workers, Figure 48 shows a room containing ornaments, framed pictures, flowery wallpaper, draperies and a large chest of drawers. Yes, the couple live in a single room (a bed is visible, and drying linen) but their home is not achingly naked like those that so horrified nineteenth-century observers and which have survived as tropes.

The working-class home



Fig. 2.—Interior of House in Court.

Figure 49: *Interior of House in Court* (Godwin 1854, 5).

George Godwin, who recorded the empty poverty of Figure 47, shows us a slightly more luxurious interior in Figure 49, a room that that has a few pictures hanging on

the chimney-breast and some objects on the mantelpiece. Although its sparseness horrified Godwin, this is a cared-for environment: framed pictures are symmetrically arranged on the chimney breast, with prints centred above them. Keys hang from nails. There is a clock and what appears, significantly, to be a pile of books.

Artists like *Phiz* would use their skills to fill or empty their illustrations of detail as suited the theme they were illustrating: mantelpieces could be crowded or bare as necessary. The mantelpieces depicted by *Phiz* (Hablot Knight Browne) in two contrasting illustrations (Figure 50 and Figure 51) show the working-class mantel as bearing a few utilitarian objects, and the middle-class mantel displaying three characteristically “Victorian” ornaments. I suggest that this is artistic licence, carried out to emphasise differences.



Figure 50: *The Visit to the Brickmaker's*. Working-class interior, 1852. *Phiz* illustration, *Bleak House*.



Figure 51: Mr Chadband 'improving' a tough subject. Middle-class interior, 1852. Phiz illustration, *Bleak House*.

As with much that follows, this distortion isn't limited to the Old World. Lizabeth Cohen describes "typical" American working class parlours of the late nineteenth century overflowing "with store-bought, mass-produced objects, carefully arranged by family members: wall-to-wall carpeting enclosed by papered and bordered walls and ceilings; upholstered furniture topped with antimacassars; shawl-draped center tables displaying carefully arranged souvenir albums and alabaster sculptures; shelves and small stands overloaded with bric-a-brac and purchased mementos" (Cohen 1980, 754). Here there is no doubt a blurring with middle-class interiors, but the interior of a well-ordered tenement (Figure 52) illustrating William Elsing's 1895 essay *Life in New York Tenement-Houses as seen by a City Missionary* emphasises that it is difficult to generalise, especially as the illustration on the opposite page shows the grim reality of "The Dark Side—under the Same Roof" (Figure 53).

Broughton's drawing reveals a draped mantelpiece displaying several figures, as well as two figures standing on wall-brackets. The Christmas tree suggests that this is a family of German origin. This is again a late nineteenth century example, but the grinding poverty shown in "The Dark Side" reveals a picture that could illustrate any year in the century (Elsing 1895, 46-7). Similar interiors are not hard to find in contemporary sources, especially those published towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when photography was becoming more often used as a recording tool.



The Bright Side of Life in a Tenement-house.

Figure 52: *The Bright Side of Life in a Tenement-house*, 1895 (C. Broughton: Elsing 1895, 46).



Figure 53: *The Dark Side of Life in a Tenement-house*, 1895 (C. Broughton: Elsing 1895, 46).

This is supported by other illustrations that were created not to show working class life in a positive light, but reality. In the age of photography, and especially in the early years of the twentieth century, records were made of so-called “slum” dwellings, usually to encourage the authorities to take action to improve or condemn them. Again, in the background, decorative objects can be seen on mantelpieces and shelves (Figure 54, Figure 55, Figure 56).

Figure 54: Ornaments on mantelpiece in New York tenement. (Detail) Early twentieth century. Columbia University Library.

<https://repository-cache.cul.columbia.edu/iif/2/ldpd:136626/full/!1200,1200/0/native.jpg>

Figure 55: Ornament on mantelpiece in New York tenement. (Detail) Early twentieth century. Columbia University Library.

https://css.cul.columbia.edu/catalog/rbml_css_0504

Figure 56: Ornaments on mantelpiece in New York tenement. (Detail) Early twentieth century. New York Public Library.

In addition, crime scene photographs, most of which were taken in working-class environments, sometimes inadvertently showed ornaments in the background to some foreground horror (Figure 57 and Figure 58).

Figure 57: Crime scene, New York. Note the figurine on the mantelpiece.

<http://tinyurl.com/ja6efmy>

Figure 58: Crime scene, New York. Note the figurine on the mantelpiece.

<http://tinyurl.com/guj7nk4>

Instead of people living in empty rooms, the cross-sections of mid-nineteenth-century New York tenements show households that, although even the best of them are far from 'cluttered', nevertheless mostly include material possessions. Yes, some of the occupants of the Drake engraving (Figure 59) are shown in rooms lacking furniture, but the majority have furniture, including sideboards, tables and chairs. Significantly there are several mantelpieces with objects on them as well as pictures on the walls (Figure 60).

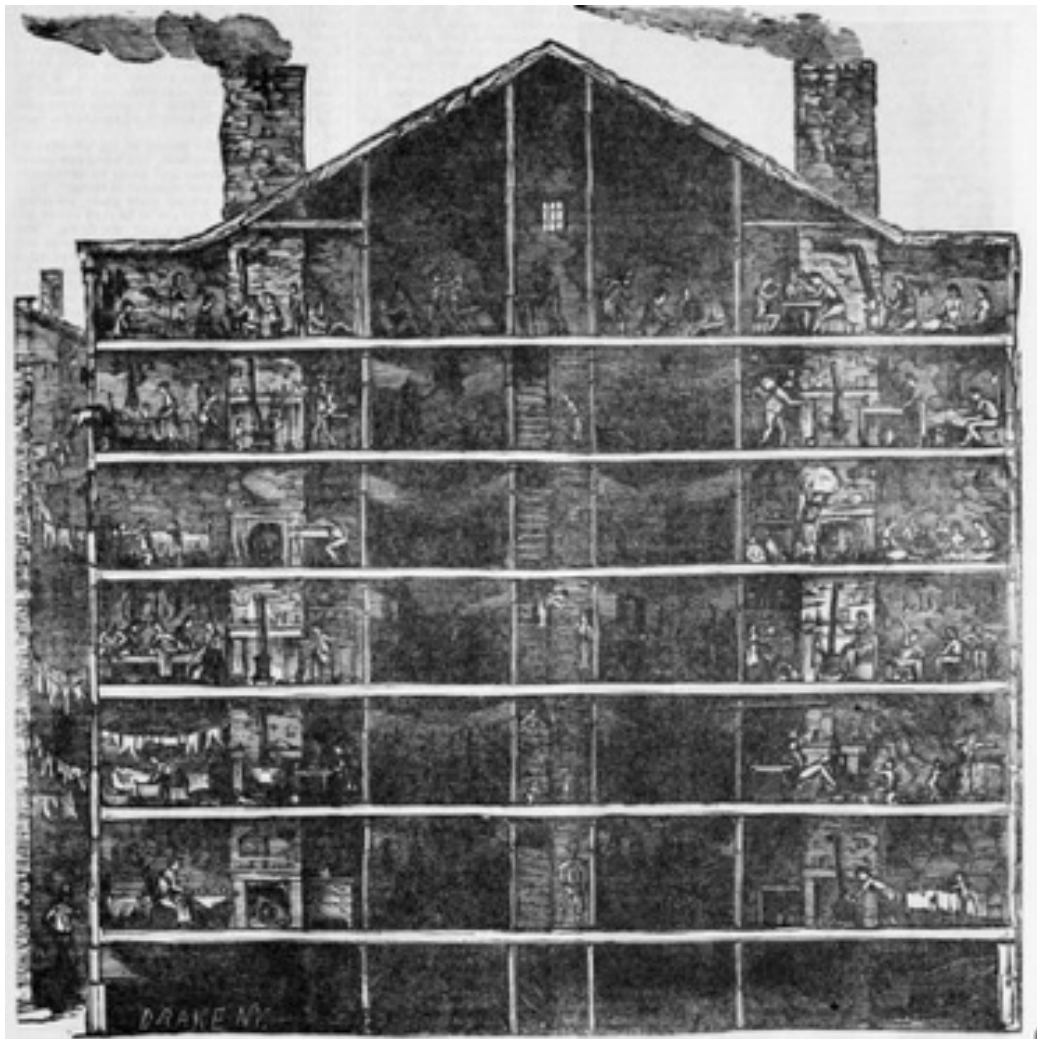


Figure 59: Cross-section of nineteenth-century New York tenement, 1884, Drake.

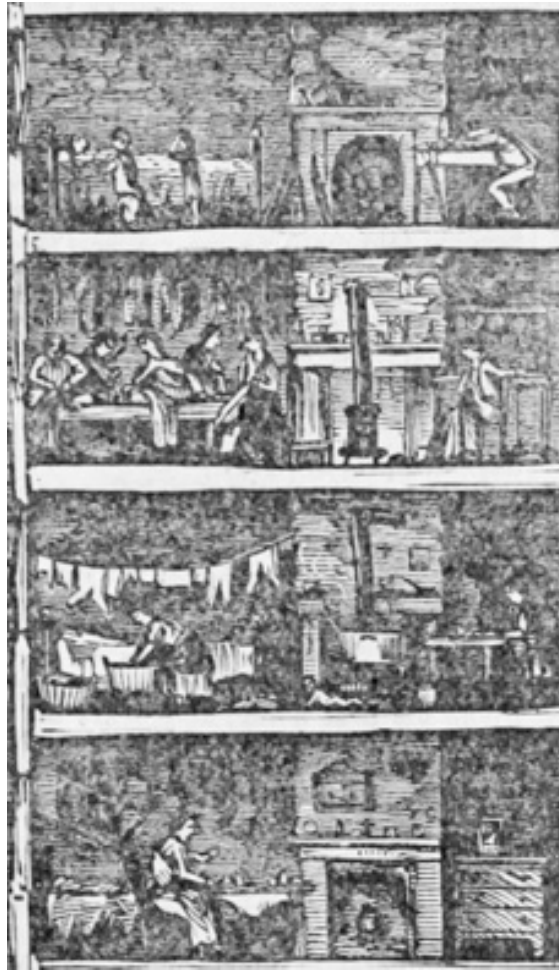


Figure 60: Cross-section of tenement, (Detail, digitally clarified) 1884, Drake.

A larger, and clearer 1865 engraving (Figure 61) includes a wide range of levels of materiality. Once again the dwellings, though small, contain furniture, pictures on the walls and objects ranged on mantelpieces. These engravings were made to illustrate poor living conditions (it includes “Murder Alley”), so there was no reason to include details that wouldn’t have been there. In fact it would be justifiable to suggest that the poverty in these images was subject to exaggeration. These illustrations are useful in emphasising that the industrious classes enjoyed varying levels of materiality, with the majority being able to accumulate at least some decorative objects on their mantelpieces.

Figure 61: Cross-section of New York tenement (detail) 1865, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Zeitung* (New York Historical Society).

<http://www.maggieblanck.com/NewYork/Leslie1865.html>

Materiality and mantelpieces

*Often and often I've known a woman to sell the best part of her husband's stock of clothes for chany ornaments for her mantelpiece*⁵⁰

(Mayhew 1849, 368)

The study of seemingly prosaic objects that were nevertheless regarded as important enough to be displayed at the heart of the home is to research a valuable element of the material culture of the people who originally owned them. Art historian Jules Prown tells us that: "...the study of material culture is the study of material to understand culture, to discover the beliefs—the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time" (Prown 2000, 11). Our investigation of these objects "provides a way of understanding the social world because of the ways we appropriate it, through living with objects in our everyday lives; interacting with them, using them, allowing them to mediate between us and having quasi-social relationships with them" (Dant 1999, 201). Judy Attfield believes that "... 'the material culture of everyday life', acknowledges the physical object in all its materiality and encompasses the work of design, making, distributing, consuming, using, discarding, recycling and so on" (Attfield 2000, 3).

The mantelpiece commands the focus of the domestic interior; an altar, serving as a place to exhibit precious and sentimental objects. It has permanence and somehow stands quietly separate from the daily life around it. On the mantelpiece everyone is able to curate the things they most love

(Goode *et al* 2011)

⁵⁰ "Chany" was slang for "china."



Figure 62: Fireplaces in the basements of Ebenezer Plat Terrace, Manchester (photograph, the author).

Mantelpieces were almost ubiquitous in working-class homes. The cross sections of tenements (e.g. Figure 61) show that every dwelling included a hearth.⁵¹ Although mantelpieces rarely survive on archaeological sites, hearths and fireplaces do. In Manchester, two examples of basement dwellings were recently excavated in Chorlton-on-Medlock. Figure 62 is part of early nineteenth century Ebenezer Plat Terrace, on Lawson Street, demolished in the 1940s and until recently a car park, and which featured several basement dwellings, complete with slate fireplaces. It is now the site of Manchester University's Graphene Institute. A second example,

⁵¹ Because these examples are from the US the fireplace was often replaced by a cast iron stove, but the mantelpiece usually survived.

again discovered beneath a car park, and conveniently next door to my local pub, *The Salutation Inn*, and the site of Manchester Metropolitan University's new Student Union, uncovered more nineteenth century cellars with fireplaces, one complete with water heater and sink (Figure 63) (Mottershead 2013, 2014).



Figure 63: Fireplace in basement adjacent to *The Salutation Inn*, Manchester (photograph, the author).⁵² This hearth can be seen preserved below the floor of the Manchester Metropolitan University Student Union bar.

The Lawson Street excavation also uncovered the remains of the Albert Club, once a haunt of Friedrich Engels. He would have passed by these buildings and taken note of them and their inhabitants. Perhaps they influenced some of his views of the lives

⁵² The *Salutation Inn* bears a plaque recording that Charlotte Bronte started her novel *Jane Eyre* here in 1846.

of those working people he wrote about in his 1845 book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

What the archaeological investigation recorded were dwellings reached from street level via narrow passages and precipitous stairways, and lit by small windows opening onto the street. All the cellars featured large, slate fireplaces, each of which would have almost certainly included a mantelpiece. The fireplace would have been used for both cooking and heating (probably containing a cast iron range), and these functions would have put it at the centre of family life. Things placed on the mantelpiece would have included utilitarian objects such as candlesticks and containers. But they almost certainly would have included artefacts with purely decorative functions.

The materiality of the mantelpiece

You may often see on no very rich mantel-piece, a representative body of all the elements, physical and intellectual; a shell for the sea, a stuffed bird or some feathers for the air, a curious piece of mineral for the earth, a glass of water with some flowers in it for the visible process of creation, a cast of sculpture for the mind of man; and underneath all is the bright and ever-springing fire running up them heavenward, like hope through materiality

(Hunt 1822, 10)

The poet Leigh Hunt, writing one chilly day in October 1819 for his journal *The Indicator*, musing romantically about the materiality that was displayed above the

fireplace on a “no very rich mantel-piece” sees the presence of “a cast of sculpture” as something “for the mind” (Hunt 1822, 10). He was probably warming himself in front of a somewhat impoverished but nevertheless middle-class fire, but the meaning of the passage could apply to many a working-class hearth.

That the hearth was regarded as central to the home is underlined by the adoption of the Latin word for “hearth”—*focus*—by Johannes Kepler in 1604 to describe the meeting point of rays of light. The hearth was also the location for the shrine to the guardian spirits of the house, a place associated with the hearth goddess, ancient Greek *Hestia* and Roman *Vesta* (Anon 2016b).

Judy Attfield quotes Cox, who wrote in 1951 that “many people still feel the need for a room apart, where photographs and souvenirs can contribute to memories and where the fireplace can be treated as an altar to household gods” and went on to remind us that “one of the features that proved most intransigent to modernist reform was the primary focus given to the fireplace in the traditional interior...even after central heating became more common and there was no longer a practical reason for grouping the furniture around the fireplace, it still formed the main focus of the living room” (Attfield 1999, 79, 80). Even if the traditional hearth and mantelpiece were rejected, horizontal surfaces were still commonly used to display bric-à-brac and a coffee table might become “a small altar featuring an ornamental arrangements of objects” (Ibid).

We have to look to less poetic sources than Leigh Hunt for evidence for what objects stood on working-class mantelpieces. Contemporary writings occasionally

mentioned what was on the mantelpiece or “chimney-piece,” although not usually in great detail. Henry Mayhew, in writing about the homes of Northumberland and Durham miners, mentions that “the mantelpiece is generally crowded with little ornaments of china and glass” (Razzell and Wainwright 1973, 227). In London he is surprised to find “traces of household care” in the homes of the “Street-Irish”, including “the mantelpiece with its images” (Mayhew 1851, 110). In one house he notes “a long looking glass reflecting the china shepherds and shepherdesses on the mantel-piece, while framed and glazed, all around were highly-coloured prints, among which, Dick Turpin, in flash red coat, gallantly clearing the tollgate” (Mayhew 1851, 85) while in the home of a costermonger he records that “the wall over the fire-place was patched up to the ceiling with little square pictures of saints, and on the mantelpiece, between a row of bright tumblers and wine glasses filled with odds and ends, stood glazed crockeryware images of Prince Albert and M. Jullien” (Mayhew 1851, 47).⁵³

Expressing a common attitude at the time, Mayhew regarded these objects as something of an extravagance:

Above and upon the poor man’s mantelpiece was a profusion of small pictures and common china ornaments (his notion of the beautiful), among which his crucifix (for he was a Roman Catholic) was not wanting...The same improvidence - which is the invariable concomitant of every kind of labour that is uncertain - prevails among this class as among all others where the income is of a precarious character

⁵³ Louis-Antoine Jullien (1812-1860) Conductor of popular light music.

(Mayhew 1850)

In his 1849 exploration of the homes of “operatives” in Hulme, Manchester, Angus Reach also had found that “upon the chimney-piece was ranged a set of old-fashioned glass and china ornaments”. Even the “older, worse-built, and in all respects inferior quarter of Ancoats” Reach came across “now and then a row of smoke-browned little china and stoneware ornaments on the narrow chimney-piece” (Aspin 1972). In a Northampton shoemaker’s home, Reach noted that “Shakespeare and Milton are headless as they stand upon the mantel-piece” and “bear witness to the dissipated habits of their occupiers” (Razzell and Wainwright 1973, 81). On the other hand, in a London furniture workers lodgings, he found “very white and bright-coloured pot ornaments, with sometimes a few roses in a small vase, are reflected in the mirror over the mantelshelf” (Razzell and Wainwright 1973, 134), and in the home of Middleton Silk Weavers he saw “On the high chimney-piece were tiny pieces of nick-nackery, china, and glittering ware, in the usual cottage style” (Razzell and Wainwright 1973, 198), while in a Northumberland and Durham pitman's cottage “The mantelpiece is generally crowded with little ornaments of china and glass” (Razzell and Wainwright 1973, 227).

On the other side of the world, the mantelpiece would be similarly decorated. A description of an Australian pub invites the reader to “imagine a snug little parlour in the back part of a snug little house, in a snug out of the way part of this very snug little town...the mantelpiece with its shells and china ornaments; let him imagine all these sorts of things, and he will have a very correct idea of the little back parlour

attached to the *Old Kangaroo*" (*Launceston Courier* 1842). *The Georgian Index* web site informs us that "In humbler households in England, Europe, and the colonies, inexpensive chalkware copies of the desirable and expensive Staffordshire ware sat atop mantels. Chalkware ornaments cast of gypsum-based plaster of Paris came in all the favorite Staffordshire ware shapes: kings, queens, heroes, animals, and the latest fad--shepherds and shepherdesses complete with sheep" (Anon 2008b). Even in that then-new African country of Liberia the traditions continued:

...Nearly all of the dwellings in Liberia, outside of Monrovia, are furnished plainly--very much in the style prevalent amongst colored folks in America. There were the familiar plaster of Paris images, dogs and cats on the mantels, the familiar gaudily gilded and painted china cups and mugs, and the familiar ghastly caricatures of Scriptural scenes... I could easily imagine myself in the best room of a respectable colored family down south...

(The Anderson Intelligencer, August 22nd, 1878) (South Carolina)

This paragraph allows us to catch a glimpse of another rarely-reported domestic context; "the best room" of a southern black household.

Diana Maltz points out that the lack of a mantelpiece was considered a major disadvantage (Maltz 2006, 55), while Clarence Cook, writing in 1881 of his ideas of the *House Beautiful*, pours scorn on those who kept "putting in expensive make-believe fire-places, and erecting mantel-pieces over them, as if they couldn't bear to give up the memory of what had once been so pleasant" (Cook 1881, 111). He goes on to similarly describe the horrors of make-believe logs, "marbleized slate" used in

cheap fireplaces to “tickle the buyer’s eye,” veneers and “meaningless mouldings” (Cook 1881, 112-3). Cook is writing of middle- and upper-class homes, but his belief that “however willing people have been to give up fireplaces, they have not been willing to give up mantel-pieces” (Ibid, 117) also applies to working-class homes, and there too Cook’s conclusion runs true, that “the mantel-piece ought to second the intention of the fire-place as the center of family life—the spiritual and intellectual center” (Ibid, 121).

We can obtain glimpses of working-class mantelpiece materiality from a scatter of contemporary illustrations. For example a *Venus de Medici* and a *Mercury* appear on the mantelpiece in Rowlandson’s caricature of *The Profligate* (Figure 64).

Figure 64: *The Profligate*. Before 1827. (detail) Rowlandson

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/thomas-rowlandson/the-profligate-CwquP4wmBVniXiB6QVPEow2>

In the view of a hospital ward in Figure 65, the huge mantelpiece is crowded with figures.



Figure 65: Early hospital ward (detail) Thackray Museum, Leeds.

A cat and three kittens gambol in front of the fireplace in George Cruikshank's watercolour *Mr Bumble and Mrs Corney Taking Tea* (Figure 66).



Figure 66: *Mr Bumble and Mrs Corney Taking Tea*, 1838 (George Cruikshank)

(Scanned by Philip V. Allingham, The Victorian Web)

<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/cruikshank/ot12.html>

Cruikshank's illustration for Dickens' *Oliver Twist* includes part of a mantelpiece, on which stands a figurine of Paul Pry (Figure 67) with his usual umbrella tucked under his arm.



Figure 67: A figurine of *Paul Pry* stands on the mantelpiece in Cruickshank's *Mr Bumble and Mrs Corney Taking Tea* (Detail).

Paul Pry was the principal character in a successful comedy written by John Pool and premiered in 1825 (see also p 269). Pry was a voyeur and Cruickshank's inclusion of the notorious character adds to the sexual element suggested by the romping cats (see also Philip Allingham's and Michael Steig's 2014 commentaries on *The Victorian Web* site). He and we are spying on an intimate moment, forcing us to echo Pry's famous utterance "I hope I don't intrude."

A fine striped cat is seen on the mantelpiece in *Interior of a House in Compton Bassett*, painted by Elizabeth Pearson Dalby, 1849, along with a building and two smaller figures. This and the rest of the interior in Figure 68 remind us that nineteenth century interiors could be places of light and colour.

Figure 68: *Interior of a House in Compton Bassett*, 1849, Elizabeth Pearson Dalby (Salisbury Museum)

<http://www.salisburymuseum.org.uk/collections/art-collection/cottage-interior-compton-basset>

Another mantelpiece, this time apparently rural, its extent frustratingly hidden by a curtain, appears in James Collinson's painting of 1850, *Answering the Emigrant's Letter* (Figure 69). The artist included two figures, probably Staffordshire ceramics, as well as a toy horse. Collinson painted one figure, of a boy and seated girl enough detail that I allowed me to identify a surviving example that appeared on an online auction site (Figure 150)

Figure 69: *Answering the Emigrant's Letter*, 1850 James Collinson (Manchester Art Gallery).

<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/collection/?id=1966.179>

The patron saint of lost objects

Captured accidentally during the official recording of poor living conditions, a variety of decorative objects can be seen on the mantelpieces and shelves of “slum” tenants in photographs taken in New York in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 70 to Figure 78). Some are identifiable, while others are tantalisingly trimmed by the edge of the photographs, are out of focus or blurred. Cats and dogs are visible, as are religious figures, including St Anthony, the patron saint of lost objects, and, interestingly given that these images are from New York, British royalty.

Figure 70: Ornaments on New York “slum” tenement shelf (detail). They include a figure of St Anthony carrying the Child Christ and a lily. (New York Public Library).

Figure 71: Ornaments on mantelpiece in abandoned tenement 1935 (detail). They include a St Anthony carrying the Christ Child and an unidentifiable family group, perhaps the Holy Family. (New York Public Library).

<http://19th20thcenturyurbanization.weebly.com/living-conditions.html>

Figure 72: Figurines, including King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra and two children, on New York tenement shelf. (detail) (New York Public Library)

<http://www.shorpy.com/node/10298>



Figure 73: Ornaments on New York “slum” tenement shelf. (detail) The lower half of a figure is visible. (Columbia University Library)

<https://repository-cache.cul.columbia.edu/iiif/2/ldpd:136662/full/!1200,1200/0/native.jpg>

Figure 74: Ornament in New York tenement 1930s (detail). A figurine of a dancer is visible. (New York Public Library). <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b4afdefd-4a57-146a-e040-e00a180610a2>

Figure 75: Ornaments on New York “slum” tenement shelf. (detail). Two small, unidentifiable figures are visible. (New York Public Library)

Figure 76: Ornaments on New York “slum” tenement shelf. (detail) They include a Madonna, probably plaster of Paris. (Columbia University Library)
<https://repository-cache.cul.columbia.edu/iiif/2/ldpd:136062/full/!1200,1200/0/native.jpg>



Figure 77: Ornaments on New York “slum” tenement shelf. (detail). They appear to include a Rogers figurine and a pair of larger plaster “images.” (Columbia University Library).

<https://repository-cache.cul.columbia.edu/iif/2/ldpd:136056/full/!1200,1200/0/native.jpg>



Figure 78: Ornaments on New York tenement mantelpiece 1902 (detail) At least one small bust is visible in this blurred image. (New York Public Library).
<http://flashbak.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/nypl.digitalcollections.510d47e3-4c82-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.001.w.jpg>

That these assemblages of objects were not unusual is also borne out by an examination of the objects stolen by various petty criminals operating in London, as well as those objects that played minor roles in their and others’ crimes.⁵⁴ Objects were often hidden beneath or inside “images” on mantelpieces: examples include the highway robbers Millson and MacDonald who hid a watch inside an “image:”

I found this watch (producing it) crammed up in the hollow part of a plaister of Paris image; a piece of rag was stuffd in to keep it up.

(Proceedings of Old Bailey, 12th September 1770)

⁵⁴ See Appendix III.

One of the interesting facts to emerge from Old Bailey proceedings was that furnished “lodgings” often included decorative objects (sometimes subsequently stolen by tenants).

Punch celebrated the materiality of the mantelpiece in a number of cartoons. In Figure 79 the shelf displays the (fanciful) busts of politicians, while in Figure 80 we can see what I identify as a nodding Buddha.



Figure 79: *The Politician*, 1842. *Punch or the London Charivari*, Vol 2 p 74.



Figure 80: *Cupid out of place*, 1841. *Punch or the London Charivari*, Vol 1, p 247.

Individually, the items may be viewed as beautiful, incredibly crafted or even plain ugly and pointless, yet when arranged on a mantelpiece this stuff creates a narrative, expressing the design handwriting of the creator.

(Curtis 2011)

6: The Archaeology of the Plumtree Court

Mantelpiece I

“Of No Great Note:” the historical context

Were you to seek out Plumtree Court, off Shoe Lane, Holborn, in *Google StreetView* today, you would find yourself in one of those melancholy urban non-streets that lurk behind and beside so many modern buildings. When recorded by the Google Earth camera in May 2015 it was no longer a thoroughfare, its Farringdon Road end blocked by bollards (Figure 81). It was now solely offering access to an underground car park, though still affording a glimpse of the ornately mid-Victorian Holborn Viaduct around the corner.

Figure 81: Plumtree Court, Holborn, in 2015. (Image: Google Earth).

Until recently, the south side of the Court was occupied by the *Evening Standard's* Fleet House, but by 2015 this had vanished, to be replaced by the new headquarters of Goldman Sachs. The north side is dominated by the forbidding brick cliff that is the rear elevation of the City Temple of 1874, destroyed in the second World War and rebuilt in the 1950s.

Before the nineteenth century, Plumtree Court was a narrow alley amongst other narrow alleys that had escaped the Fire of London. In the twentieth century it thrummed not with throngs of humanity but with the rumble of a daily newspaper's printing presses. Plumtree Court is now a shadowy *cul-de-sac* lined with "no parking" signs, where passers-by have no reason to pause as they walk towards Farringdon Road and Holborn Viaduct, or the sandwich bars of Shoe Lane. Though it now physically leads nowhere (at least for vehicles) Plumtree Court nevertheless leads to the heart of this project.

In the eighteenth century, Plumtree Court, "large and well-built", was described by Strype as the "best of all" the "great many alleys and Courts of little Account" in an area "of no great Note" either for buildings or inhabitants, the other alleys and courts being variously described as "very mean and ordinary", "indifferent good" and "ordinary" (Strype 1720, 282).⁵⁵ Things had not improved by the time that Charles Dickens described the area in *Oliver Twist*:

A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. There

⁵⁵ Plumtree Court was also recorded as "Plumb Tree Court" and "Plumptre Court."

were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses; and in them, the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main.”

Reflecting Dickens’ description, at least three taverns opened onto Plumtree Court, the *Angel*, the *Bull Head Tavern* and “*The Plum-tree* in Plum-tree Court, Shoe Lane” which Caulfield describes as a meeting place of criminals (Caulfield 1819, 63).

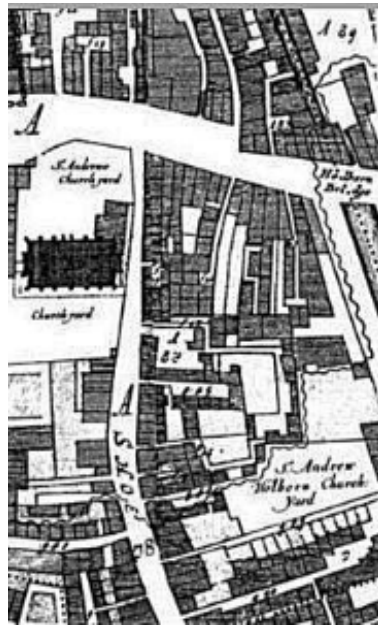


Figure 82: Detail of Ogilby and Morgan’s 1676 map of London and Holborn. Plumtree Court zigzags to the east of Shoe Lane, just to the south-east of St Andrew’s Church.

Early maps (Figure 82) show an area crammed with small dwellings, all no doubt influenced by the noxious, malodorous proximity of the Fleet River or Fleet Ditch, then a busy waterway just to the east. Since this area escaped the fire of London (just, the wavy line on Ogilby and Morgan’s 1676 map, Figure 82, shows the limit of the conflagration), it is likely that many seventeenth century buildings survived into

the nineteenth century, and were those referred to by architect and reformer George Godwin when he wrote that “this most abominable of rivers has been hidden from the sight; and the houses originally on its banks have to a great extent been swept away...Plough-court, Plumtree-court, Holborn, and a few other bits within this part of the City...give some notion of the houses formerly on the vacant space. Buildings have been cleared away, and those who inhabited them have been driven to equally unfit lodgings in other districts” (Godwin 1854, 10).

Not long before Godwin visited the area, Plumtree Court, along with other nearby rookeries, was described by Thomas Beames as a “plague spot” (Beames 1852, 65). But by the time Godwin arrived the northern side was an empty space awaiting redevelopment, though along the south side of the Court a handful of houses still backed onto a warehouse (Figure 83).

Figure 83: Plumtree Court before development of its north side, 1860. (Digimap)

Some idea of the type of buildings in the area can be gauged from illustrations made during the construction of Holborn Viaduct in the 1860s. In Figure 84, beyond the demolition of houses on Holborn Hill, the spire of St Andrews Church, Shoe Lane, almost opposite Plumtree Court, can be seen in the background, and the corner of the lane is visible beyond the omnibus to the right of the centre of the illustration.



Figure 84: Preparing for the Holborn Valley improvement, 1863. *Illustrated London News*.

In 84 the eastern end of Plumtree Court can be seen in a photograph of the nearly-completed viaduct taken in 1869.



Figure 85: The eastern end of Plumtree Court visible from the nearly-complete Holborn Viaduct, 1869. *Illustrated London News*.

It was this area in decline, soon to be demolished, that Godwin was exploring in the 1850s. Armed with his “manifesto” of “Drain the Swamps and Build the Bridges” he was gathering evidence for his campaign to improve the housing conditions and thus drain the “swamps,” the “social pathologies” of the poor, and establish “bridges,” “institutional infrastructures” such as education and healthcare (Marriott 2003, 182).

In Plumtree Court, Godwin was to find an example of the “love of art”; a phenomenon he was convinced would build one of his social bridges. On the one hand, in number 9 Plumtree Court, he found 67 people crammed into fifteen rooms, and in number 24, some 40 – 18 adults and 22 children – squeezed into just four rooms (Godwin 1856, 305). On the other hand, he was able to find something “agreeable and cheering” in plaster casts of spotted cats and painted parrots.

The archaeological assemblage

...a group of objects on a living-room mantelpiece can be analysed in ways which yield information about their fabric, decoration and construction. They can also be perceived as performing a range of functions which help to keep our society in being: they help to maintain the production system of manufacture and purchase, they play a role in our family lives, they are a means by which social prestige can be maintained, and one of them will tell us what time of day it is

(Pearce 1995, 15)

As Susan Pearce explains, the mantelpiece was a place where assemblages of decorative objects were common. Paul Johnson quotes Mrs Samuel Barnett's *Thrift Manual*, in which she exclaims in horror that "in most rooms...there are too many ornaments...I have counted as many as seventeen ornaments on one mantelpiece – three, or perhaps five are ample. She who aims to be thrifty will fight against yielding to the artificially developed instinct to possess" (Johnson 1988 37).

In the case of Plumtree Court the mantelpiece and the wall behind it, physically linked at a moment in time form an archaeological context, one that can be recorded and compared with other contemporary contexts. Without realising it, the artist who sketched the mantelpiece became an archaeologist, making a two-dimensional record of everything he could see. The objects on the shelf and wall form an archaeological assemblage.

We might regard a typical (that is, socially acceptable) line-up of objects on a living-room mantelpiece as a material culture set which forms an integrated, organically related, or metonymic, unity

(Pearce 1995, 15)

The archaeology of the Plumtree Court mantelpiece allows us to focus on the centre of anonymous lives that were probably spent almost entirely within a small area of London, perhaps just between the stench of Fleet Ditch and The Strand. Everything that might be required for those lives was available within a few streets and alleys: food (Farringdon Market was a hundred metres to the south, there were costermongers even closer, and at least one eating house) drink (a superfluity of inns and taverns, including several in and around the Court itself), furniture, ornaments, hardware, pawnshops, lamp oil, coal, entertainment, medicine, hair cutting, bakers, farriers, chandlers, stationers, printers, pewterers, picture frames, hatters, hosiers, access to religion, schooling (there was at one time a ragged school in Plumtree Court), Sunday School, slaughterhouses, a workhouse and burial grounds.

The source of the artefacts

Just a few paces to the west of Plumtree Court is Shoe Lane, the likely source of many of the household's possessions. There, anyone at large would have encountered:

Chair-menders – “Ornaments for your fire-stoves!” - Fly-catchers - Draught-bags - Italian images - Sham sailors - Groundsel - Baked chestnuts and

*potatoes - Night refreshments - Fruit and vegetable hawkers - Strawberries in
pottles - Street stalls - Orange girls - Hand-bills - Beggars with paintings -
Cheap Jacks - Preachers - Waits – Workmen’s paper caps - Soldiers - Sailors -
Pensioners - Beadles - Lamplighters - Crossing sweepers - Shoeblocks –
Undertakers.*

(Bennett 1924, 52-3)

In the midst of that bustle, almost overlooked in Bennett’s list, “as he thrids his way with care,” is a seller of “Italian images,” one of a class of itinerant peddlers known as “image-sellers,” “image-boys,” or *figurinai*.⁵⁶ It was to their activities and their stock-in-trade that I looked in order to carry out the next stage of my investigation.

⁵⁶ Wordsworth wrote in his *Prelude* of an Italian image seller in 1805 threading his way carefully through a crowd of pedestrians.

7: The archaeology of the Plumtree Court mantelpiece II

“Images, very fine, very pretty!”

Italian image vendors carried platforms of plaster-of-Paris busts about, and now and then sold one, it is to be presumed, since they went on doing it

(Bennett 1924, 53)



Figure 86: *The Dealer in Images*, from *London Cries Illustrated for the Young* (Anon 1845).

The “Dealer in Images” in Figure 86 introduces a central element of my research. I have recognised the significance of a commercial activity and class of decorative objects that have been granted very little attention but which were important features of working-class life during the nineteenth century. Composed of some of the “images” that people bought from itinerant peddlers in the streets of the nineteenth-century industrialising world, his legs are Tam O’Shanter and Souter Jonnie, a young Queen Victoria and Shakespeare. On the tray he is balancing on his head stand figurines that feature repeatedly in my research: Napoleon Bonaparte, Madame Vestris, Paul Pry, a parrot, a cow and a horse. The illustration may also include John Bull and Wellington.⁵⁷ The illustration encapsulates the trade of itinerant “image-sellers,” mostly Italians, who were to be found on every continent between the late eighteenth century and the early twentieth, dealing in figures made from plaster of Paris.



Figure 87: *Grand architectural panorama of London 1849 (Detail) Sandeman and Leighton, British Library.*

So familiar were image-sellers that one featured in a nineteenth-century equivalent of *Google Streetview*. About three metres along the *Grand Architectural Panorama*

⁵⁷ See Appendix I p 62 for further discussion of this illustration.

of London, published in 1849, on the corner of Regent Street and Charles Street, a tiny figure can be seen wandering along the gutter (Figure 87).⁵⁸ He's an image-seller, with his tray of images on his head. It looks as if he's heading for a small crowd that's gathered on the pavement, as is the legless beggar on his trolley beside him (Figure 88). A crowd means more potential customers for them both.

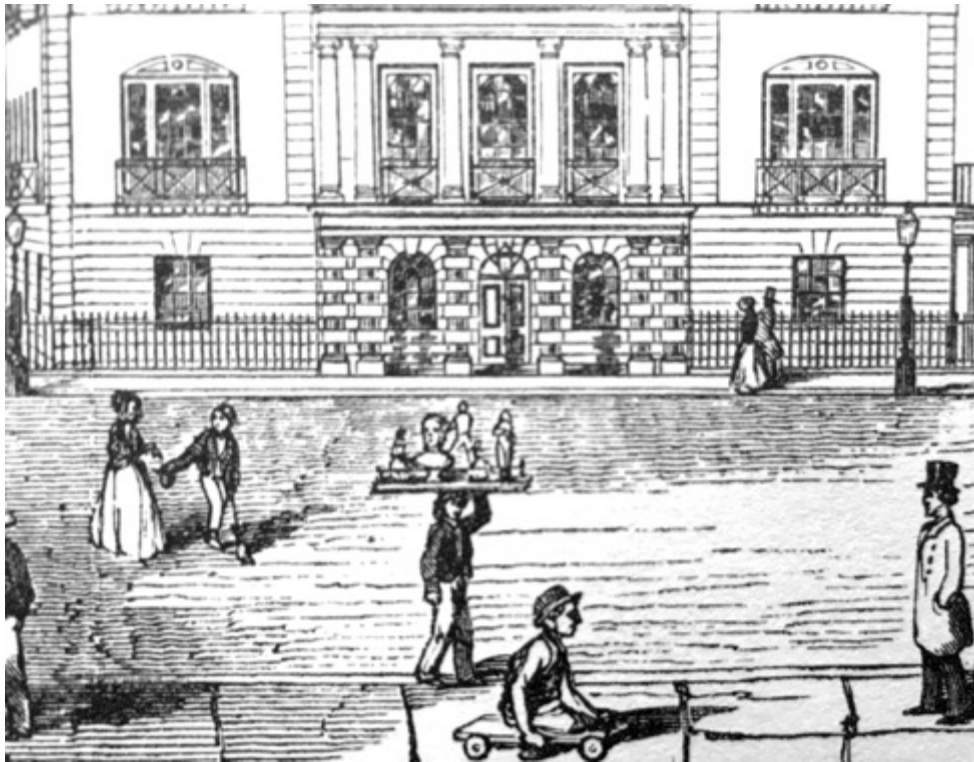


Figure 88: Image-seller at the junction of Regent Street and Charles Street. *Grand architectural panorama of London 1849* (Detail).

This section explores the lives of those itinerants, the *figurinai*, their realities and the positive and negative aspects of their lives. It surveys their stock-in-trade, the plaster of Paris and earthenware objects they hawked in the streets. It notes the attitudes of those writers, journalists, poets and artists whose eyes and ears were attracted by the image sellers' street cries of "Buy My Images!" And, importantly, it also looks at their customers, the working-class people who displayed their wares on their mantelpieces, and what other objects they purchased.

⁵⁸ The panorama is only 115mm high, though 5.7m long.

This section frequently refers to the Appendices. Appendix I consists of a gallery of images that illustrate the topics discussed here. Appendix II is an anthology of texts that have been used as a source for much of what follows.

The ubiquitous image-seller

When Columbus stepped for the first time onto the shores of America, he was met by a stucchinale or image seller from Lucca, in Italy, eager to interest the great explorer in his wares

(Ross and Erichsen 1912, 116)

The story retold by Ross and Erichsen was almost certainly invented to emphasise the ubiquity of the Italian image-seller, who by the middle of the nineteenth century was a familiar character on almost every continent.⁵⁹ These itinerants, their lives, what they sold and who bought their stock-in-trade are little known today.⁶⁰ Perhaps this is because they sold their wares almost exclusively to ordinary working people, and because those wares were prosaic, without pretention, were cheap and cheerful, perhaps even more so than much of the output of Staffordshire potteries, and were fragile, easy to break and to discard.

The home-grown image sellers selling spotted cats, whose displacement by Italian immigrants was regretted by *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* in 1853, were perhaps the same as those of whom Bea Howe writes when she describes villagers flocking

⁵⁹ It also appears, in French, in Paulucci di Calboli's 1909 book *Larmes et sourires de l'émigration italienne* so was probably widely known (Paulucci 1909, 101).

⁶⁰ I presented at a conference in 2015 during which two Italian academics in the audience expressed their astonishment that they had not heard of this activity.

to the “Image Man” for his “gaudy and gay chimney ornaments,” alerted by his cry of “My casts are formed to get my bread, and humble shelter for my head.”⁶¹ Howe continued that: “What he sold reached their rural market only by means of his own initiative and sturdy legs. Storms, rain, and high march winds or sudden biting flurries of snow in early spring, what did the weather matter to the Image Man. For he was sure of a warm welcome at the end of his long tramp” (Howe 1973, 178-9). Although this is a colourful account, I wonder if it is entirely accurate. The two-line verse “My casts...” also appears as a caption beneath a Bewick woodcut and is rather a mouthful for an itinerant pedlar.⁶² Though pedlars in general sold a variety of utilitarian and other objects, I have not come across any evidence that the “Image Man” sold anything but images, the “gaudy and gay chimney ornaments” that Howe writes of.

We can learn most about image-sellers not from historians, who, apart from Paola Sensi-Isolani (1990) have merely occasionally mentioned them in passing, but from the popular media of the time. For example *Bow Bells*, “a magazine of general literature and art, for family reading” published *Buy Images!*, a lengthy piece by an anonymous writer, that began:

IMAGES! Buy images!”

*Such was the cry of an Italian images-seller, as he proceeded on his way
down one of the narrow, ill-paved streets of a little town in the Potteries.*

“Who’ll buy images? Vill you buy one sir?”

⁶¹ Lloyds Illustrated Newspaper: see Appendix II, p 198.

⁶² See Appendix I, p 112.

The words were addressed to a little ill-clad boy, who gazed wistfully up at the miniature sculpture gallery on the head of the Italian vendor. The collection was made up of copies in plaster-of-Paris from old and modern statues, mixed up with Prince Alberts, Wellingtons, and Napoleons crossing the Alps. There were some of Pradier's lovely representations of soft and delicate women, Canova's dancing-girls, Venus, Isis, Apollo Belvidere, and a beautiful cast of the boy extracting a thorn

(*Bow Bells* 1873, 118)

We learn much from just this couple of introductory paragraphs – an Italian with a strong accent, he's daring to peddle his plaster of Paris wares in the centre of nineteenth-century ceramics manufacture. We are also introduced to some of the characters in the "gallery" on his head – Prince Albert, Wellington, Napoleon, and a host of copies of classical statues including the *Spinario*, or the *Boy with Thorn*.

In the streets of the nineteenth-century world's rapidly-expanding cities, scores of hawkers plied their wares, their cries competing in the general pandemonium for the attention of passers-by. Amongst the entreaties to buy "Rhubarb!" "Watercress!" or "Cherries, Ripe!" would be heard the cries of these "low foreigners" (Hotten 1860, 205), who would weave amongst the crowds bearing their fragile wares on boards that they carried on their heads, or in baskets slung from a shoulder (or both).

"The most visible European migrants on the streets of London in [the early nineteenth century] were the Italians. John Thomas Smith, keeper of prints at the British Museum and a brilliant chronicler and illustrator of London street

life before 1820, detected an increase in 'idle foreigners' at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, 'who now infest our streets with their learned mice and chattering monkeys'. 'Italian boys' sold images

(White 2011, 140).

Italian image-sellers mostly originated in the province of Lucca (see map, Figure 89), in the Val di Lima and the mid Serchio Valley (Museo dell'Emigrazione della Gente di Toscana). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this was a picturesque but impoverished rural area where families eked out a living farming the slopes of the Appennines.

Figure 89: Map of Northwest Italy, showing Lucca and Coreglia Antelminelli.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1809_Pinkerton_Map_of_Northern_Italy_\(Tuscany,_Florence,_Venice,_Milan\)_-_Geographicus_-_ItalyNorth-pinkerton-1809.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1809_Pinkerton_Map_of_Northern_Italy_(Tuscany,_Florence,_Venice,_Milan)_-_Geographicus_-_ItalyNorth-pinkerton-1809.jpg)

Les petits villages de la montagne lucquois "où viennent les mouleurs ont un cachet tout a fait spécial. Déjà Heine, dans ses Reisebilder, avait chante les beautés naturelles de ce petit coin de paradis terrestre, dont il disait qu'il n'avait jamais vu rien de plus beau. Entre les buissons de myrtes et les forets de chataigniers, parmi les parfums de roses, dans un cadre de lignes harmonieuses qui expriment toute une civilisation et s'accordent avec le pale

*azur du ciel, s'elevent des maisonnettes blanches, propres et coquettes,
comme de jolies femmes poudrées*⁶³

(Paulucci 1909, 96-7)

The rise of the *figurinai*, the makers and sellers of figurines, appears to have followed the decline of the *Della Robbia* earthenware manufactory in the late sixteenth century.⁶⁴ While the highly-decorated *Della Robbia* polychrome wares had been expensive and sold to the elite, plaster of Paris offered a much cheaper method of creating ornaments (Tognarelli 2015).

My research indicates that image-sellers were certainly well known throughout Europe and beyond well before end of the eighteenth century. They were, by the first years of the nineteenth century, already familiar enough to be the subjects of illustrations in children's books, alphabets, artists' paintings, and Rowlandson's caricatures.⁶⁵ Henry Geyer had been manufacturing plaster of Paris figures in Boston in the 1760s, and it is likely that the trade had been in existence in Europe much earlier.⁶⁶ The anonymous writer (perhaps S. Wood) of *Cries of New York*, a small volume for children published in 1808 that has been described as the "first distinctly American picture book" (Anderson 2004, 40) included a woodcut of an image seller (Figure 90).⁶⁷

⁶³ The small villages amongst the Lucca mountains from whence come the *figurinai* leave a quite special impression. In his *Reisebilder*, Heine sang the natural beauty of this little corner of paradise, of which he said he had never seen anything more beautiful. Among myrtle bushes and chestnut forests, surrounded by the scent of roses, in a harmonious landscape that expresses an entire civilization and matches the pale blue of the sky, are clean and tidy white-fronted houses, as pretty as powdered women. [my translation]

⁶⁴ A maker of plaster of Paris figures was also known as a *gessaio* or *gessaiuolo*. The sellers of figures were also called *stuchcinai* (Mattioli 1879, 680) and previously *stucchini*. The makers and sellers themselves preferred *figurinai* (Paulucci 1909).

⁶⁵ See Appendix I, p 6.

⁶⁶ See Appendix II, p 164.

⁶⁷ See Appendix I, p 13.

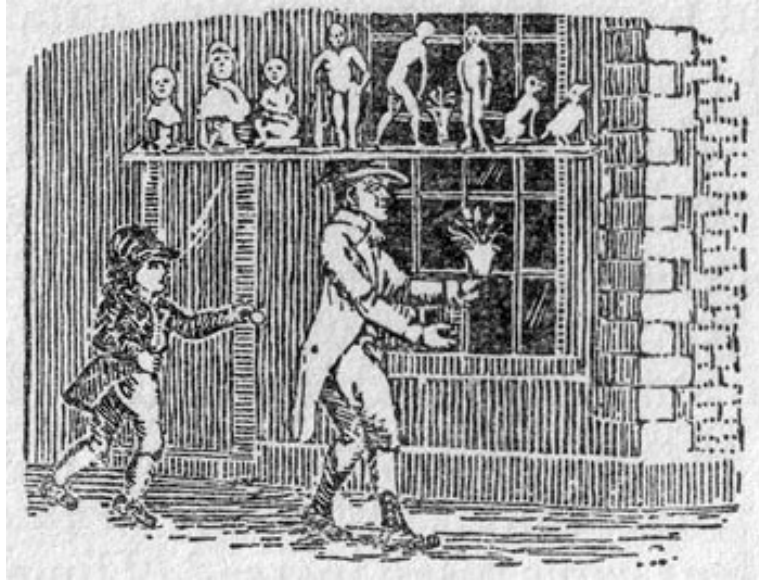


Figure 90: *Images, very fine, very pretty*, 1808. (Wood).

Although the accompanying text in *Cries of New York* restricts “images” to representations of animals, the woodcut, probably taken from another publication or a job lot, shows a good selection of human or godly figurines, including a couple of busts, with only a cat and a duck representing non-humans. The seller, who is balancing his board on his hat, no-hands, appears to be about to make a sale, as a boy is approaching, coin in hand.

*This man, although his business is not so useful or necessary as some others, yet strives to please by presenting a variety of images, or representations of animals, which he carried around to sell. This is his way to get a living. They are made of plaster of Paris, which is a kind of stone that abounds at Nova-Scotia*⁶⁸

(Wood 1808, 37)

⁶⁸ Nova Scotia is still a significant producer of gypsum, the raw material of plaster-of-Paris.

Another example is the illustration for the letter *I* in *The Uncle's Present, a New Battledoor*, published in Philadelphia in about 1810 (Figure 91) and copied in other publications.⁶⁹



Figure 91: “Images, very fine, very pretty”, 1810. From *The Uncle's Present, a New Battledoor*.

Emigration was a fact of life in poorer parts of Italy, and those with ambition, or simply a need to survive, left the villages in their hundreds, if not thousands, seeking El Dorado. Emigrants from Lucca took with them a skill that arose seemingly by chance in the villages of Barga and Coreglia Antelminelli:

Coreglia Antelminelli was the “capital” from which departed, through the centuries, the most significant numbers of figurinai, followed by Montefegatesi; there were centres in Tereglio, Barga, Bagni di Lucca, Borgo a Mozzano and Camaiore. In Coreglia existed a school, founded by Baron Carlo Vanni, where he taught how to “throw in the mold” with regular courses in

⁶⁹ See Appendix I, p 14.

*drawing and modeling. From that school came trainers, designers, modelers of this art all its own*⁷⁰

(Lera 2015, my translation)

Guiliamo Lera considers that the locals absorbed culture from an early age through folk stories. He also describes people sitting in the shade of beech trees in the summer and by the fire in winter listening to readings of “poems of chivalry, the *Divine Comedy*, *Orlando Furioso* and *Gerusalemme Liberata*.”⁷¹ He suggests that being immersed in these tales of heroes led the *figurinai* to incorporate these characters in their creativity, as well as familiar animals (Lera 2015).

The standard system was for a *padrone* or “master” to collect a small team, a *compagnia*, usually of young boys. According to Sensi-Isolani a typical *compagnia* would be made up of a *capo*, later known as a *padrone*, under whom would be several men, *garzoni*, often close relatives, each destined perhaps, having acquired experience and capital, to later form their own *compagnia*. Moulds would be carried with them, but the *compagnia* often included individuals who were skilled enough to sculpt figurines or busts, *formatori* who would make new moulds that would meet changing markets and *gittatori* who cast the figures (Anon 2015a).⁷² The image-makers would often simply make a cast of a Staffordshire figure or similar, and manufacture cheaper plaster versions. The cast making process was called *gittatura*, or throwing, which referred not to the familiar throwing of clay in the making of pottery, but to the swirling of liquid plaster of Paris around the interior of

⁷⁰ Founded in 1883. Vanni lived in Vienna.

⁷¹ *Orlando Furioso* was a sixteenth century epic poem by Ludovico Ariosto that celebrated love and chivalry. *Gerusalemme Liberata* was a sixteenth century epic poem by Torquato Tasso that fictionalized the First Crusade.

⁷² *Capo* translates as “boss” or “head,” *garzoni* as “boys” or “journeymen.”

the mould by the *gittatori*, and pouring away of any excess, to create a hollow cast. Some plaster casts were painted, usually in garish, often bizarre colours, by *pittori* and *decoratori*, while others were left white. The simplest form of decoration of the cheapest casts was simply the soot from a smoking lamp flame. Some casts were varnished, and, later in the nineteenth century, many casts were given a coating of metallic paint to resemble bronze.

Because plaster figures were both fragile and heavy, the *figurinai* developed a system of mobile production. At first, moulds were be created in Lucca, and taken with the “wandering Italians,” who would obtain cheap plaster of Paris wherever they stopped, and would cast their stock in trade in temporary “statuaries.” Initially the trade was divided into *campagnie*, journeys of months or years but leading to an eventual return to Italy. As trading distances grew longer, image-sellers would settle, as they did in London, for longer periods, and often permanently.

Moulds began to be made locally in temporary or permanent workshops, which gave the *figurinai* the ability to meet regional demands for celebrities unknown in Italy.⁷³ In the US, this has caused some confusion, with the plaster of Paris objects often being regarded as originating with the Pennsylvania Dutch and German communities, rather than being created by the peripatetic Italians living temporarily in those communities.

⁷³ For an example of a workshop in New York, see Appendix I, Figure A1.50, p 69. See also Appendix II, pp 234, 237, 241 and 276.

Thomas Archer provides a brief but vivid glimpse of life in the “image shops” that were inhabited by foreign workmen, the modellers of plaster figures, wearing green tunics, blue blouses and concertina-shaped hats and where “grimy cupids swing disconsolately from the ceilings in a dim twilight till the gas is lighted, when they vibrate like monstrous moths intent on self-destruction” (Archer 1865, 66-67). He describes “little illuminated plaster of Paris edifices which Italian image men sell in poor neighbourhoods” (Archer 1865, 45), thus supporting my contention that these artefacts were sold amongst and to working people. The illuminated building would probably have resembled that illustrated in Allis’ 1941 article in *American Collector* magazine (Figure 92).



Figure 92: A Victorian Cottage in Chalk Described by Mary Allis as “very rare” (Allis 1941).

I have found a number of accounts of plaster of Paris manufactories. A workshop in 1883 Pittsburgh used zinc moulds that cost between \$1 and \$10 depending on their complexity. Air under pressure was used to force plaster into some moulds, while

other figures were made solid. The company imported and rotated moulds as the market became saturated.⁷⁴ Another workshop in Philadelphia, recorded the same year, used gelatine moulds that cost \$2 each to make and would last for 50 figures. Plaster cost \$1 a barrel, enough to make 500 images. The writer calculated that each figurine cost about 10 cents to make. Better quality figures, made by “American manufacturers of images” used more expensive moulds and more skilled workers. Their images would cost about 40 cents each to make.⁷⁵

A St Paul, Minnesota, workshop, described in 1885, added salt to the plaster of Paris to make the figures stronger. The journalist calculated that, allowing for the time the plaster took to harden, trimming and varnishing, it would take about two and a half hours to make a George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, to be sold for 50 cents.⁷⁶ In 1903, a reporter from the Indianapolis *Sunday Journal* discovered that a “dingy” frame building at 505 South Delaware Street was the unprepossessing location of the workshop of Erigo Gauspari, who, with two assistants, manufactured plaster of Paris “statuettes.” Here amongst all-enveloping fine white plaster dust, the three “picturesque” “dark-skinned image-makers” created miniatures that were to be sold in Indianapolis’ department stores, “notion” stores (shops selling haberdashery supplies and other small items) or peddled in the streets. We are told that Guaspari gauged the market, deciding whether to produce “Madonnas, or Beethovens or Shakespeares.” Although he despatched the “young Italian peddlers” to the residential areas of the city, he also had contracts for his “frail little images” with

⁷⁴ Appendix II, p 232.

⁷⁵ Appendix II, p 234.

⁷⁶ Appendix II, p 242.

large department and china shops, and that “hundreds and hundreds of little statuettes that are to be seen in Indianapolis households were carefully planned and more carefully manufactured” in the “modest little workshop.”

Their subjects were either reduced from full-sized statues and other artworks and, later, photographs, copied or moulded from the output of potteries, or originals were created using local intelligence. It was likely that erotic and pornographic images were easier to make in the small-scale and often back room plaster of Paris statuary than in the factory setting of a pottery. Plaster of Paris figures could be created more quickly than their ceramic equivalents, and the design abandoned more quickly should the subject fall from actual and/or commercial grace (Charton 1850, 389).

Brittle distortions

Although figurinai might stay in a particular location for some time, they often did not put down roots. Linda Villari explained this eloquently in 1885:

[The] figurinaj [sic], the plaster image men...with their trays of brittle distortions of famous statues, are to be met with in almost every part of the globe....but the Italian race being ever essentially home-loving, these Lucchesi seldom settle abroad. Sooner or later they find their way back to their native place⁷⁷

(Villari 1885, 137-8)

⁷⁷ See Appendix II, p 243.

Aside from her revealing implication that the wares of image-sellers were hardly accurate representations of great works of sculpture, Villari implies that in 1885 image-sellers were active in “almost every part of the globe.” Interestingly she later mentions “sulphur-moulds,” a technique described in *The Penny Magazine* of June 1844 (Anon 1844, 236) that involved melting sulphur and then pouring the thickening material around the object to be moulded.



Figure 93: Mastheads (1891 and 1894) of the short-lived *il Figurinaio* newsletter.

This was a hugely significant economic factor in Lucca (Figure 93). At the beginning of the twentieth century, when the *figurinai's* trade was in decline, the post office in Montefegatesi, near Coreglia, still received 100,000 francs every year from abroad.⁷⁸ Some of this would have originated in larger-scale enterprises set up by emigrants, but most would have come from individuals scattered across the globe. This income flow would have been correspondingly higher at the peak of the trade, about 50 years earlier.

Paola Sensi-Isolani considers the story of the emigration of the *figurinai* to be “in many ways unique” since for 300 years it “scattered the inhabitants of a few villages to four continents”. She stresses the ingenuity of the figurine-makers and sellers, and believes that “the objects d’art and busts of culture heroes they sold help us understand the relationship between the artistic tastes of middle, upper and working-classes, and give us some indication of the historical figures they considered important” (Sensi-Isolani 1990).

Image sellers’ lives, reality and romance

It was a quiet sort of petty trade

(Sponza 1988, 75)

Lucio Sponza, in his 1988 book exploring Italian immigration into nineteenth century Britain, suggests that: “modellers and their street vendors hardly caught the eye of the keen observer of the picturesque among the London poor” (Sponza 1988, 75).

⁷⁸ Approx €370,00 (http://www.leparticulier.fr/jcms/c_109215/conversion-en-francs/euros-constants-les-nouvelles-valeurs-2010 = approx £300,000).

He points out that Henry Mayhew appears not to have noticed them in his perambulations, but as my survey in Appendices I and II reveals, writers and artists had indeed often observed and commented on these peddlers.⁷⁹ In 1894, late in his life, journalist George Sala looked back at his boyhood in the 1840s and remembered buying “plaster casts” from “Italian image boys” who would congregate in the portico of Hanover Chapel, Regent Street: “They were wont to loiter on week-days under the columns of the portico, and rest their burdens on the pedestals.” Sala tells of their swarthy complexions and “flashing black eyes”, and of the boards they carried on their heads “crowded with plaster-of-Paris effigies of the Venus of Milo, the Huntress Diana, the Triumphal Augustus, Canova’s Three Graces, the Dying Gladiator, Shakespeare, the Great Duke of Wellington and last, but not least, Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria”. By the time he was writing, Sala mused that the image boys were “a race who appear to me to have almost entirely vanished from the Metropolis” (Sala 1894, 228-9).

Writing in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* in 1882, “Aunt Maggie” tells us that: “I have a vivid recollection of a little Italian image boy, with his brown skin and liquid dark eyes, bearing a board on his head covered with grotesque looking dolls clothed in wool, who had the assurance to ask: “Buy a Sha’speer, Mees?” That was all the English he could muster, but it was enough for Stratford that day [the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth]” (*Nottinghamshire Guardian*, Friday, April 14, 1882).

⁷⁹ Mayhew appears to have intended to include them in a later volume, but failed to do so.

Sala's recollection of the image-sellers' "flashing black eyes" and Aunt Maggie's memory of "brown skin and liquid dark eyes" are examples of a fascination with the appearance of Italian image-sellers and makers. We learn from the writer of the Indianapolis *Sunday Journal* in 1903, for example, that with his "twinkling black eyes" Antonio Tomeoni, an image-maker who had newly arrived in the city from Italy, was as "handsome as many of statuettes of Apollo which he makes himself" and that he and his compatriots were "picturesque." Leigh Hunt oozed in 1834: "how many of these sun-tinted dark-eyed wanderers from the south have we not encountered, all with some individual charm, some touch of spirit to animate their clay, as if the soul of the sculptor had animated the forms with which their pursuit had made them acquainted."⁸⁰

Writers enthused that "ITALIA's sun-burnt native" (Harris 1804, 28) might be a "black eyed, sun-burnt urchin" (Smith 1830, 12), amongst "sun-tinted dark-eyed wanderers" (*The Monthly Repository* 1834, 756), with his "coal-black eye...his curly locks, his sallow cheeks" (Smith 1841, 243), a "little black-eyed black-haired and dark-skinned Italian" (*The Cairo Bulletin*, January 21st 1882), a "handsome, black-eyed fellow" (*The Indianapolis Journal*, March 17th 1889) with "black hair and a sallow face" (Hardy 1895).

The "son of the sunny south" (*Willamette Farmer*, June 30th 1882) came "Sunny Italy" (Anon 1845; *The Graphic* January 10 1874; Greenwood 1876, 111-2; *The Sunday Journal*, January 25th, 1903). He would miss "the sun that warms [his] native

⁸⁰ Appendix II, p 174.

soil” (Smith 1841, 243). Leigh Hunt in *The Monthly Repository*, notices “their glances of expressive admiration– nay, affection–for the objects of their occupation” and asks that we “hear their eloquent description of the different works of art with which they are familiar” and then compares them with local “ragged urchins” who “infest” the streets. Never disregarding the cry of “buy images!” the writer tells of a head bearing the “weight of white beauties” (Hunt 1834, 756).

We know from a number of illustrations (Appendix I) what some image sellers wore, though it seems that there was no general “uniform.” At the beginning of the nineteenth century sellers were pictured wearing long jackets and wide-brimmed hats.⁸¹ By the 1820s many image-boys appeared to have adopted a short jacket and a narrow-brimmed or brimless padded hat.⁸² Many adult *figurinai* wore long white coats.⁸³ This costume may have been the result of clothing becoming white with plaster dust. An 1884 fancy-dress manual adds:

*PICCOLINO. An Italian image seller. Waistcoat of scarlet cloth fastened round the waist with a sash of brown silk. Green plush knee breeches. Drab cloth gaiters. Sugarloaf hat trimmed with wild flowers. Board of images on the shoulder, the jacket slung at the back*⁸⁴

(Anon 1884, 69)

⁸¹ See Appendix I, p 3.

⁸² See Appendix I., p 24.

⁸³ See Appendix I: Figure A1.35, p 42; Figure A1.42, p 54; Figure A1.46, p 59; Figure A1.47, p 61; Figure A1.53, p 70; Figure A1.80, p 104; Figure A1.103, p 126; Figure A1.127, p 150.

⁸⁴ See Appendix I, p 99.

Leather Lane and Saffron Hill

Hosts of Italian masters also congregate in [Saffron Hill]; and the screams of the unfortunate boys, who writhe beneath the lash of their furious employers on their return some after an unsuccessful day with their organs, monkeys, white mice, or chalk images, mingle with the other appalling or disgusting sounds, which make night in that district truly hideous

(Reynolds 1845, 45)

George Pardon, in his *Popular Guide to London*, lists “the producers of plaster casts and images in Leather-Lane, Holborn and the surrounding courts” (Pardon 1862).

Richard Rowe waxes eloquent when he writes of an 1868 visit to St Alban’s parish:

“But a still queerer locality is the parish’s eastern limit, long, narrow Leather Lane. So very narrow is its cleft-like Holborn end, that when, owing to diversion of traffic, an omnibus gets there, it seems as if it must necessarily stick, like a fat man in an arm-chair, between the forward-leaning walls. On either hand there is a shop with an Italian name on the lintel, Italian images in plaster and terra-cotta in the windows, and plaster “roses” hung like shields upon the door-posts”

(Rowe 1881, 356)

Charles Manby Smith noted that in the area of London he scornfully disguised as “Lagsmanbury” lived “a various and vagabond multitude of foreigners.”⁸⁵ He described some of these as “poor exiles, spoiled for all useful purposes by the reception of our national bounty - starving on a trumpery pittance which they ought

⁸⁵ “Lagsmansbury” referred to Bedfordbury, near Leicester Square and Covent Garden (Allen 1998, 166).

long ago to have learned to do without, and too proud and lazy to work to increase it". But here too were "makers and hawkers of plaster images, roaming the street by day, and modelling their wares by night." (Smith 1857, 138).

Children would be contracted, often by their desperate parents, into the charge of a master in exchange for money and/or goods. It was reported in 1890 the "parents of five little boys had sold their offspring for a bottle of olive oil and \$2 apiece."⁸⁶ This newspaper story may have been a racist and sensationalising exaggeration, but given the treatment that many of the boys experienced it is probably not too wide of the mark. On witnessing the treatment of image boys in 1837 London, the Italian reformer and agitator Mazzini declared that this was "a species of white slave trade" and not only formed an association for their protection and, in 1841, The Italian Free School, but also took masters to court for assaulting their charges (Zucchi 1992, 25). There were accounts of beatings well into the twentieth century: Raniero Paulucci di Calboli reported abuses meted out to Italian boys in France in his 1909 book *Larmes et sourires de l'émigration italienne*.⁸⁷

Not everyone welcomed the increasing numbers of Italians wandering the country, often wielding parrots. Travelling in Scotland, the Chambers brothers bemoaned the fact that: "The days of highland romance are entirely gone. Instead of seeing the bonneted chieftain with his claymore, or even a kilted billy, striding down the braes, your musings are broken in upon by the apparition of an Italian image-seller, resting

⁸⁶ Appendix II, p 251.

⁸⁷ An aristocratic diplomat and longtime campaigner against the trafficking of children (Papadia 2014), Paulucci di Calboli nevertheless appears to have had more sympathy for image sellers than organ grinders, who he regarded as an "obnoxious plague" (Sponza 1988, 282).

beneath the tufted rock by the wayside, and who is on an expedition to disseminate painted parrots and Bonapartes over the country of Rob Roy and Maccullamore” (Chambers and Chambers 1836, 309).

The lives of image sellers, whether boys or adults, were often hard, sometimes violent and occasionally brutal. Several image sellers were murdered: an Italian image boy was killed in London in 1831 in order to sell his body, and in 1882 an elderly image seller was murdered in Dayton, Ohio, for his not inconsiderable savings.⁸⁸ Their precariously-transported and fragile wares were accidentally or deliberately broken, and sometimes stolen, as in the 1890 case of Pietro Passarotti, who went to the Bristol home of William Mitchard, who took two busts from the Italian and put the on his mantelpiece, then Mitchard dragged the unfortunate man into his backyard, stole 15 shillings and poured dirty water over him.⁸⁹

The Morning Chronicle in 1834 reported that “Antonio Caracel, an Italian image-hawker, charged a cab-driver with having committed wholesale destruction upon his stock in trade, consisting of a great number of Napoleon’s and Wellington’s head, and the heads of others who were illustrious in other respects.” He had about 30 heads upon his shoulders, worth about 20 shillings.

Figure 94 illustrates the plight of Aristide Borelli, who was beaten by passers by in Paris and his stock of images destroyed. Ironically, he is likely to have received a

⁸⁸ See Appendix II, p 170.

⁸⁹ See Appendix II, p 252.

second beating from his master on returning without either stock or money. Note both his tray, with its cord edging and lack of spikes, his padded hat, his basic equipment, and the figure of Venus in the foreground.



Figure 94: *Angoscie e dolori ignorati: il dramma del piccolo figurinaio Italiano Aristide Borelli, a Parigi* (Anguish and sorrows ignored: the drama of the small Italian *figurinaio* Aristide Borelli, in Paris). (*La Domenica del Corriere*, 5 April 1903).

This event, recorded in *La Domenica del Corriere* magazine in Italy, but probably also in France, may have provide the inspiration for the 1907 Pathé Brothers film *Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes* (*The Little Statuette Seller*) which told a similar story of

hardship and brutality but had a happy ending.⁹⁰ A second film with the same title was made in 1913, but this time the story was a romantic comedy.⁹¹ The 1909 song *Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes*, recorded by Berthe Sylva in 1938 (see page 285) echoes the same theme.

L'hiver est dur, la bise est froide

Alan Rauch's suggestion that the Italian image-sellers were considered "endearing rather than threatening" (Rauch 2013) is perhaps borne out by a poem (or ballad) by a minor writer, identified only as "Upton", who reminds us of the hard life led by the Image Boys:

*O, YE who can feel for the offspring of grief,
Give ear to an alien, that sues for relief,
From the cravings of hunger and outcast defend,
Bereft of a parent, relation or friend:
Pity, pity a stranger, debarred of all joy,
A destitute, wandering Italian Boy.*

(Upton 1826, 3)⁹²

Another poem, this time captioning a photograph on a French postcard posted in 1903 (Figure 95) includes the lines "L'hiver est dur, la bis est froid" ("Winter is hard, the wind is cold; See, my hand is blue and stiff)."⁹³

⁹⁰ Synopsis, Appendix II, p 280.

⁹¹ Synopsis, Appendix II, p 286.

⁹² See Appendix II, p 165 for the full poem.

⁹³ See Appendix II, p 274, for the full poem.

Figure 95: *Marchand de Statuettes*. Postcard, postmarked 1903.

https://www.delcampe.net/en_GB/collectables/postcards/france-limoges/limoges-les-petits-metiers-de-la-rue-marchand-de-statuettes-cachet-postal-ambulant-de-toulouse-a-paris-1909-154242576.html

Upsets

Jerome K. Jerome wrote that: “I have seen a good deal of trouble in my life, but never one yet that did not have an Italian image-vendor somehow or other mixed up in it. Where these boys hide in times of peace is a mystery. The chance of being upset brings them out as sunshine brings out flies” (Jerome 1905, 292).



Figure 96: *The large lady had been thrown some half a dozen yards against an Italian boy, 1905. Jerome K Jerome.*

Image-boys and image-men, their personalities and the precarious manner in which they carried their wares, attracted comment, both amused and serious. In 1874, *The Graphic*, in reviewing Weisz's engraving *A Tempting Offer*, reported that: "Cynics used to assert that these itinerant vendors never sold any of their brittle wares, but that once or twice a day they used to run against a prosperous-looking benevolent old gentleman, overturn the contents of their board, and receive on the spot liberal compensation for the damage effected."⁹⁴ This probably apocryphal story was repeated several times during the century and formed the kernel of a short story, *An*

⁹⁴ See Appendix I, Figure A1.69, p 91.

Iconoclast (see Appendix II, p 263). There was a similar story circulating amongst newspapers and magazines in the mid 1800s.⁹⁵



Figure 97: *Little Samuel was Past Praying For*, 1895. Illustration from *An Iconoclast*.

The 1907 Selig Polyscope film *The Book Worm* features a man who walks the streets reading a book, obviously bumping into a variety of characters as he makes his way along and, inevitably, “he encounters an Italian image-seller, whose tray is knocked off his head and the sidewalk covered with broken images. The Dago demands pay, but not getting it, pelts the bookworm with the fragments” (Internet Movie Database).

⁹⁵ See Appendix II, pp 217, 263.

“As many heads as a Hydra:” The Romantic Image-Seller

Figure 98: *Self Portrait with Casts: the Image Seller*, 1850. William Daniels (Katrin Bellinger collection).⁹⁶

<http://www.apollo-magazine.com/art-diary/drawn-from-the-antique/?map=active>

Poets, both renowned and forgotten, took notice of image-sellers. In 1805, Wordsworth in his autobiographical *Prelude*, mentioned an image seller, “The Italian”, in the midst of London’s “hubbub:”

The Italian, as he thrids his way with care,

Steadying, far-seen, a frame of images

⁹⁶ See also Appendix I, Figure A1.53. p 70.

*Upon his head; with basket at his breast*⁹⁷

(Wordsworth 1850, 180)

Wordsworth also encountered an “adventurous boy” in 1820, a London-bound “Italian Itinerant”, whilst travelling in Europe, who would, on his head:

*“...poise a show
Of Images in seemly row;
The graceful form of milk-white Steed,
Or Bird that soared with Ganymede;
Or through our hamlets thou wilt bear
The sightless Milton, with his hair
Around his placid temples curled;
And Shakspeare at his side—freight,
If clay could think and mind were weight,
For him who bore the world!”*⁹⁸

(Wordsworth 1822, 33)

In her 1842 poem *Lines, occasioned by seeing an Italian Image-Boy asleep on a doorstep with his face turned towards the morning sun*, a minor poet, Mrs Gore (almost certainly Catherine Gore) compares the image-boy’s “rugged” life in the midst of “soot-suited London’s grim and harsh routine” with his Italian homeland. In London, “the dreariest city under Heaven’s expanse,” he is surrounded by “rumbling wheels – the cries of petty trade – the coarse rebuke of pride, in oaths conveyed,” hollow laughter, ribald jests and “vulgar clamours”. She hopes the sun will cheer his

⁹⁷ *The Prelude, Book VII, Residence in London.*

⁹⁸ The “milk-white Steed” may have been a play on the white plaster and, perhaps, Pegasus.; the “Bird that soared with Ganymede” was Zeus, in the form of an eagle; busts of Milton invariably have long, curly hair; “Shakspeare” was an alternative spelling. Busts of Shakespeare and Milton were apparently very popular; “him who bore the world” was presumably Atlas.

blood and “Italianize” his dream, with memories of “sunbright” homeland with its “sad-hued olive-grounds, the golden plain...roving vines...orange blooms...pine woods...gleaming lakes...white-walled hamlets. She imagines that his “young brethren, pausing in their play, lift up their little swarthy hands in prayer.”⁹⁹ Of course, in truth, the Italian boy had escaped, willingly or not, the crushing poverty of his homeland.

Horace Smith, brother of poet James Smith, was the author of *The Italian Image-Boy*, a sketch published in his *Midsummer Medley* of 1830.¹⁰⁰ In it he stalks a “black-eyed, sun-burnt urchin” along lanes near Kennington, on the way noting the boy’s cargo, which “enables us to place celestials upon our shelves, and keep a Mount Olympus of our own, at the expense of a few shillings.” Smith suggests that “an Image Boy,” with his load of “mimic gods and goddesses,” “is the last lingering remnant of Paganism.” So intent is the writer in eulogising the “gush of Thessalian and Arcadian air” that he experiences as he muses over the array of plaster images, that he loses sight of his subject, who suddenly turns down “Gravel Lane,” leaving the author to trudge unhappily along a footpath past a brick-kiln, in reluctant earshot of two fish-women (Smith 1830, 12-26).

Like his brother, Smith compares the Italian’s “finest relics of antiquity” with the “wretched collection of painted plaster dolls, lions, monsters, shapeless allegorical nondescripts, with here and there a sprawling whole-length cross-legged Milton or

⁹⁹ See Appendix II, p 180.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix II, p 170.

Shakespeare” that English image sellers had previously hawked. He then continues to enthuse over the busts of famous authors (“busts are delightful”) until the image boy reappears, crying: “Buy any image! Buy any image!” The figures on his “pantheon for the divine minds, the intellectual heroes and demigods, the inheritors of fame of every clime and epoch” include Homer, Socrates and Sappho, the statesman George Canning, Benjamin Franklin and Voltaire, Antonius, the lover of Hadrian, a “charming” piping faun “leaning against a tree”, and Apollo (the author already has two Apollos, and rejects a friend’s claim that the figure is effeminate).¹⁰¹ He pays the image boy, whose name is Nasoni (big nose), and finishes by deciding he is a descendant of Ovid and that “the gods and goddesses whom this illustrious ancestor carried in his head, the juvenile descendant carries on his head” (Smith 1830, 26).

Whilst at the beginning of the century, image-sellers were regarded with curiosity, as interesting, exotic strangers, by the mid-century they had been caught up in the general mood of romanticism. Illustrations changed from being simply illustrations, instructive or humorous, to being moody and allegorical.

An early example is Jean Henri de Coene’s *A la Sante de l’Ancien* – A toast to the old times (1834), in which a white (plaster?) figurine of Napoleon is brandished at the brightly-lit centre of the painting.¹⁰² Fendi’s 1841 female *Figurine Seller*, young, rosy-

¹⁰¹ This is probably a reduced cast of a statuette in the Vatican museum. A plaster example can be seen in the Crawford Art Gallery, Cork.

¹⁰² See Appendix I, Figure A1.27, p 32.

cheeked and beautiful, is upstaged by the praying angel figure she is carrying.¹⁰³ The ethereal figures on the tray William James Muller's 1843 *Image Seller* is balancing on his head echo and perhaps contrast with the towers and roofs of the townscape in the background.¹⁰⁴ Francis William Edmonds painted an American domestic scene filled with light and meaning, from a Napoleon at the pinnacle of the scene, through to a bust of Washington being explained by an old man to a boy and an old lady being tempted by a bowl of brightly-coloured fruits.¹⁰⁵ James Collinson's *Italian Image – Boys at a Roadside Alehouse* (1849) dates from his flirtation with the Pre-Raphaelites, with impassive softly-lit faces and warm colours.¹⁰⁶ His slightly later *Image Boy* (1858) swarthy, large-eyed, with well-worn clothes, stands in vivid contrast with the gleaming white bust of Clytie he is holding.¹⁰⁷

William Daniels was so taken with the idea of the image-seller that he painted himself as one, in *Self Portrait with Casts* (1850) (Figure 98). He gazes at us from the shadows beneath a tray full of worthies, and cradles a bust of Homer in his left arm. A goddess stands proudly at the painting's zenith, next to Shakespeare. A very different painting, Daniel's *The Italian Image Seller* contrasts the whiteness of figures of Clytie and Hermes with the scruffy but steady-gazed image-seller, his clothes dusted with plaster. A squall is approaching in the background, underlining the toughness of the peddlers' lives.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ See Appendix I, Figure A1.34, p 41.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix I, Figure A1.37, p 45.

¹⁰⁵ See Appendix I, Figure A1.40, p 50.

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix I, Figure A1.46, p 59.

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix I, Figure A1.60, p 80.

¹⁰⁸ See Appendix I, Figure A1.66, p 87.

Two little girls stand at the centre of Hugh Cameron's 1862 painting *The Italian Image Seller*. The exhausted Italian lies sleeping, gazed at by one of the girls, while the other admires his tray of statuettes, which include Walter Scott and Milton.¹⁰⁹

The French Quarter Statuette and Doll Peddler, painted in 1884 by Alfred Boisseau, is tanned and handsome. His wares shine against a dark background, in which only the seller's face glows.¹¹⁰

The hardship of image-sellers' lives is shown by Carl von Stetten's painting *Jeunes sculpteurs sur un pont à Paris, l'ancien Trocadéro à la distance* (1888).¹¹¹ They lean against a parapet beside the Seine, the elder, his arms crossed, looking wearily off into a distance we cannot share, while the younger, a child, holds us in his exhausted gaze. They wear grubby coats and scuffed shoes. Evening is creeping mistily over the old Trocadero on the far bank. At the very edge of the painting a hooded, cringing figurine of *Winter* seems to be trying to conceal her nakedness from the attention of a large Apollo.

The romanticism of the image seller was still present in Geo Roelandt's 1924 painting *Le Marchand de Statuettes*, though is tempered by the drawn features of the image-seller and his direct but doleful gaze.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix I, Figure A1.64, p 84.

¹¹⁰ See Appendix I, Figure A1.75, p 98.

¹¹¹ See Appendix I, Figure A1.80, p 104.

¹¹² See Appendix I, Figure A1.110, p 133.

Culture, language

As immigrants, Italian image-sellers brought with them elements of their home culture, and of course their native language. Whilst they may have conversed with each other in Italian, they were having to sell to, and therefore communicate with, potential customers who spoke a variety of languages.

The cries of image-sellers had many variations. Although I have yet to come across what image-sellers shouted in the streets of Russia or China, records of a few other cries in have survived. “Buy images!” is the most frequently reported, along with just “Images!” “Buy my images!” and “Buy any images!” Some sellers added “Very pretty!” and “Very cheap.” They would sometimes announce a particularly popular figure such as “Sellee ze image! Sellee ze image! Garibaldi, George Wash!”¹¹³ In Sweden they shouted “Plaster cats!” (“Gipskatter”), in Germany “Gipsbilder!” Their strong accents might result in “Himachees!” and “Vera beautiful!” and “Vary sheep!”¹¹⁴ The 1856 ballad *Come Buy My Pretty Images* mimics the Italian accent: “dese” “de” “vill” “wid” “nevair” “noting.”¹¹⁵ In the song *Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes* (1909) we hear Berthe Sylva beg “Santi belli, signor? Santi belli Signora?” a cry familiar in France and Italy.¹¹⁶

One of the strangest cries was that heard in 1857 Strasbourg:

¹¹³ See Appendix II, p 285.

¹¹⁴ “Vera beautiful” see Appendix II, p 244; “vary sheep” see Appendix II, p 202.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix II, p 201.

¹¹⁶ See Appendix II, pp 282 and 291.

Do not forget, because this is one of the prettiest cries of Strasbourg, the Piedmontese who cheerfully announce their figures or statuettes: "Pippeli kof! Buy statuettes!" and who had even one day the fancy to improvise a nice song by saying: "Gäli Pippeli, grüni Pippeli, Pippeli Poppeli Pippeli kof!"

(Kestner 1857; my translation)¹¹⁷

Seen from this century this cry appears to be either nonsense or somewhat obscene ("pippeli" is slang for penis in some northern countries). However it may incorporate forgotten nineteenth-century slang.

Whilst the Dutch *beeld* can translate directly as "image" in the three-dimensional physical sense, the French *image*, by the nineteenth century, seems to be limited to two-dimensional pictures. Like French, other languages tended to use the material composition of the figures to describe them and their peddlers; i.e. as sellers of plaster of Paris figures. I have not carried out an exhaustive survey, but there appears to be no equivalent attention to sellers of *earthenware* figures anywhere (see below), though in English (and perhaps Dutch) the word "image" was also used for them. In the south of France and northern Spain the cry of "Santi Belli" evolved to become "Santons," or "Santicos," a word describing the figurines still used in often-elaborate nativity scenes. So familiar was the phrase "Santi Belli!" that in France it became a general term for a plaster of Paris statuette, whatever it represented. And if you were someone who was "*sans action et sans mouvement*" you were called a *Santi-Belli* (Avril 1839, 413). The word "gypsum" gave rise to

¹¹⁷ N'oublions pas, car c'est un des plus jolis cris de Strasbourg, le Piémontais qui annonce gaiement ses figurines ou statuettes: Pippeli kof! Achetez des statuettes! et qui eut même un jour la fantaisie d'improviser une gentille chanson sur ces mots: Gäli Pippeli, grüni Pippeli, Pippeli Poppeli Pippeli kof! (Kestner 1857).

“gips” in several languages. The original is ancient – *gypos* in Greek, *gypsum* in Latin, *jibs* in Arabic, *gephes* in Hebrew.

Throughout the nineteenth century writers frequently made fun of the struggles native Italian speakers had with English. It was often, it seems “a broken English pronunciation of which type can convey no adequate impression.”¹¹⁸ Antonio Tomeoni, admits that he doesn’t like going from house to house on snow and ice: “I am not so vera gooda on da slip’ry.”¹¹⁹ The *Sacramento Daily Union* in 1898, having fun at an image-seller’s expense, includes this doggerel: “Dat-a Napolyun, Napolyun ze gret. Dat-a good likeness...Yaas, I mak-a dem. Mak-a de mold, too. You want-a buy dat-a piece uv Vognah, de gret moosishin. Dat look-a fin on a da piano..Dat-a Venus duh Meelo. Thirty cent-a. Dat cheap...Nah; nah! Dat-a no broken. De statute hav-a no arrums. Dah nevveh find-a da arrums. Nobody know what-a she do with her arrums. Dat no broke...I tell-a you dat no damage. Dat Statue de fines’ in all de worl’. It ees wort millions dollas...Yessah. Without any arms. Dis-a good copy. Thirty cents I make it to you foh a quarter.”¹²⁰ In *The San Francisco Call*, James Crawford’s colourful report on a 1904 licencing case quotes the plaintiff, one “Signor J Pelechi” as complaining: “Whatta da use of the artist trya ta maka da leev if he peenched when he no hava da lice? Ha, ha! Itta maka me seeck...Malatesta...Sella da stat no maka damon lack sella da feesh. Catcha da feesh—maka da stat, eh? Paya da lice an’ be brok all da time, eh? Ha, ha! Notta mooch! No, sare!”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ See Appendix II, p 272.

¹¹⁹ See Appendix II, p 276.

¹²⁰ See Appendix II, p 269.

¹²¹ See Appendix II, p 279.

Missionaries of art

Those...venders of images, by selling for a few pence the plaster busts of great men and casts from ancient works of art, may pretend to the dignity of traders, and even have the merit of improving and propagating a taste for the fine arts

(Anon 1833, 42)

That the statuettes they sold might have an educational impact is underlined by a paragraph published in *The Theosophist* magazine in 1880:

An eloquent and famous American preacher once said, in an address upon the Fine Arts, that he never could see an Italian image vendor enter a poor man's cabin without feeling that he ought to lift his hat to him as to a real missionary of Art. For, rude and coarse as might be the images he carried, they still embodied at least a rudimentary idea of sculpture, and that lay latent in the mind of the poor man's son. This was a great truth that the preacher uttered, and recalls the old familiar proverb, "Despise not the day of small things

(*The Theosophist*, Vol. I, No. 6, March, 1880, p. 163)

The profusion of miniature representations of ancient statues along with writers, playwrights and notables could have been the result of "missionary aestheticism." As Maltz points out "a desire to teach the poor an appreciation of beauty pervades the literature of even the most practical late Victorian programs for the social

reform of the working classes” (Maltz 2006, 2). The view that the working classes appreciated “art” is suggested by Charles Manby Smith, who, writing in 1857, claims that “there never was a time when [the industrial classes] would not have looked with pleasure upon a picture” but he felt that “rude images and quaint casts or carvings constituted the only sort of domestic art familiar to the people” (Smith 1857, 239-40). Leigh Hunt, ever the poet, enthuses ““Buy images!’ Who ever hears the cry now-a-days without turning to the moving miniature sculpture gallery, and looking upwards to discover what new treasure of old art has been rendered accessible to eye and pocket? ...a thorough appreciation of art of every kind is one of the surest safeguards of the spirituality of people” (Hunt 1834, 756).

A writer in the *Sunday Journal* considered that the craftsmen knew “more about the masterpieces of sculpture than do many of the self-satisfied art critics, and, when one comes to think of it, is not a community greatly benefited by their presence? In the pursuance of their labor they really do more to improve the general taste, to place copies of known sculpture within the reach of all, and to familiarize the public with what is good, then any school (which only a few can attend), then any gallery (which the working classes seldom visit), or any other institution in the country.”¹²²

That these humble objects could have a positive influence even upon fertility was stressed by the “Lecturer and Correspondent on Social Purity” Ida C. Craddock who, in her 1899 book *Right Marital Living* (which provided advice on living “healthy,

¹²² See Appendix II, p 276.

wholesome, chaste lives as husband and wife”) advises her readers to “choose a suitable environment for the moment of impregnation” and to create a “temple for a sacred rite”. This should not be overloaded with “gewgaws and meaningless bric-a-brac” and need not be expensive, for “you can get, from any Italian image-vendor, cheap plaster of Paris statuettes which are copies of the world’s masterpieces” (Craddock 1899, 44).

“C.F.O” the perhaps advisedly anonymous writer of a syrupy sketch, published in 1852 in *The Cambridge Courier* (Massachusetts), is inspired by the “poor Italian boy” to gush fulsomely on “The Sense of the Beautiful:”

“Images! Images!” The sound falls on the ear with a foreign accent, and there in the street, stands the poor Italian boy, with his tray balanced on his head waiting for a purchaser for his pretty wares. There are beautifully shaped vases, urns of classic mould, and various figures, among which the favorite Fisher-boy, and Samuel are conspicuous

The writer also lists a “Guardian angel” and “Friendship” (“a boy and dog”) and is pleased that: “Yonder mechanic has taken in his hard and toil-worn hand that delicate image, the kneeling Samuel. His clear eye looks with pleasure on that innocent upturned countenance. He carries it home to be a joy and a pleasure to his wife, and to shed a refining influence over his simple abode.”

Like other commentators at the time “C.F.O.” approves of the apparent demise of earlier images:

A few years ago, cheap, coarse, red and yellow vases of fruit, or demi-figures in plaster of showy colors, or daubs of pictures of men in red coats and sky-blue pantaloons, of women in scarlet gowns, purple shawls, and green bonnets, of children robed in every color of the rainbow, and military men in coats like Joseph's of many colors —these were the attractions laid before the uneducated and unrefined tastes of the community

(C.F.O. 1852 np)

He goes on to contrast these unsophisticated images with the more tasteful “pure, white images...refined and graceful forms” that will eventually provide the uneducated with an “exquisite appreciation of the truly beautiful” (Ibid).¹²³

Did you ever sell any? Image-seller humour

Image sellers were often the butt of clumsy and sometimes cruel humour. There are repeated references to them having their tray of fragile deliberately toppled from their heads, and much mirth at their emotional reaction to the destruction of their stock. We are told about explosions of strong language, and of tears. Sometimes the jape became a crime, as those causing the destruction directed their attention to the sellers themselves. Much of the humour originated in making fun of the Italians' lack of English or strong accents. People also enjoyed hoodwinking the Italians, though of course the Italians also made fun of the credulity of their customers.

¹²³ See Appendix II, p 196.

Plaster of Paris was sometimes referred to as “chalk” (viz “chalkware” in the US) so the miniscule cartoon column-filler in Figure 99 was illustrating a simple pun. Despite its small size, we can almost identify a couple of images (a bow pot, the Borghese *Gladiator*), and note the usual short jacket and tattered appearance of the unfortunate image seller. A similar filler (Figure 100) and a similar pun features an image-seller struggling to “sustain” an improbably large group of statuettes.



Figure 99: An image seller makes a hurried departure, 1841. “Walking his chalks” was slang at the time for “taking his leave.” *Punch or the London Charivari*, Vol 2, p 132.



Figure 100: An image seller “sustains” six rather over-the-top figures in *Punch’s* play on words. *Punch or the London Charivari*, Vol 3, p165.

Even reality was sometimes peculiar, with a vein of humour. At one point in his otherwise grim exploration of London, George Reynolds describes an Italian “statuary” who operated a “depository” of plaster of Paris figures. Here he found “a strange assembly of images”:

Heathen gods seemed to fraternize with angels, Madonnas, and Christian saints; Napoleon and Wellington stood motionless side by side; George the Fourth and Greenacre occupied the same shelf; William Pitt and Cobbett appeared to be contemplating each other with silent admiration; Thomas Paine elbowed a bishop; Lord Castlereagh seemed to be extending his hand to welcome Jack Ketch; Cupid pointed his arrow at the bosom of a pope¹²⁴

(Reynolds 1845, 173)

Reynolds mischievously pairs opposing and ill-matched characters; king with criminal, bishop with anti-religious reformer, amorous Cupid and celibate Pope, Napoleon and Wellington. But in doing so he also demonstrates the range of “types” that people sought and bought; not only heroes but also anti-heroes, revolutionaries and reformers, royalty and rogues. The ordinary people of the time were happy to have heathen gods or angels on their mantelpieces, and perhaps both.

Reynolds also gives us a rare insight as to how the figure modellers worked. When presented with a potential model, a young woman, the Italian quickly measured her head and then, having ascertained that he had orders booked for “a queen, an opera-dancer and a Madonna”, states that he will use the model’s head as the basis

¹²⁴ James Greenacre (1785-1837): The “Edgware Road Murderer”, hanged for the murder of his fiancée in 1837; William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806): politician, Prime Minister; William Cobbett (1763-1835): parliamentary reformer; Thomas Paine (1737-1809): politician, philosopher, revolutionary and opposer of organised religion; Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh (1769-1822): statesman; Jack Ketch (d 1686): executioner.

of all three. So much for the “images” accurately matching the actual appearance of the individuals they were supposed to represent!

A similar wry humour is at the heart of James Greenwood’s observation that fact that the “images” were hollow had some utilitarian benefits beyond fixing them to the peddler’s tray and hiding contraband. It was in “The Italy of Leather Lane” in the mid 1800s that he recorded something of a performance during which the lunch – part of a half-quartern sized loaf of bread – of “a ragged young native of sunny Italy” whose hands were full balancing his “head-load of chalk images and monuments” was squeezed inside “an effigy of St Paul’s Cathedral” (Greenwood 1876, 111-2).

There was great interest in 1843 in the placing of the statue at the top of Nelson’s column. *Punch* was suitably impressed:

We have since seen the statue itself, which is a very excellent copy of the large plaster of Paris figures of Napoleon. We fancied we had seen it before in the New Road, but we suspect we are confounding our own heads with those chalky productions of art we have seen on the heads of the Italian image boys

(Anon 1843b, 197)

In 1849 *The Public Ledger* published a satirical letter written to Lord Derby, then leader of the Tory party and seen as sympathetic to the Catholic church. The letter complains that “Italian Image Boys” who, having previously sold “plaster busts” of Shakespeare, the Duke of Wellington and “such innocent subjects” were now attempting to sell “Papistical images” of the crucifix, Madonnas and “Angel

Guardians,” much to the annoyance of various “old maids.” Carried on the heads of the image boys and in “manifest danger of being broken” these images were contrasted with the “small and large” “modest” images of the Greek Slave, Dancing Nymphs and Venuses “dressed in every way to suit the hot season of the year.”¹²⁵

A negative review of the “masque” *The Ruins of Athens* performed (if that was the correct word for what the critic described as a “signal failure”) at the Princess’s Theatre, London in the March 6th 1846 edition of *The Morning Post* declared that “To crown the whole, the great Shakspeare [sic] was represented by one of the *statuettes* which are hawked about the streets of London, at a shilling apiece, by the Italian image-sellers.” In a similar burst of journalistic colour, Henry Mayhew shows that he must have been familiar with the subject by describing elderly chaperones at a German ball at midnight: “every one of the heads of the aged dames in black stuff nodding away, as though they were so many plaster casts of cats with movable necks arranged along the board of some Italian image seller” (Mayhew 1865, 55).

In a telling and light-hearted glimpse of the world of 1866 London, in *The Boy Detective* the writer, while exploring “Houses of the Dangerous Classes” bought “an old-fashioned plaster image from an Italian” and put it in his coat pocket. He then paid a visit to a house in a less salubrious area of Whitehall, and as he left “one of the occupants presented him with the figure, which had been dexterously extracted from his pocket, whether as a specimen of skill, or as a hint that the visitor had been treated with a certain amount of hospitality, was not clear” (Anon 1866, 232).

¹²⁵ See Appendix II, p 192.

What image sellers sold

The minor poet James Smith, romantically and informatively described “The Image Boy” in his *London Lyrics*. We learn that the boy haunts Somerset House, has “coal black” eyes, sallow skin and curly hair, wears a plaster-dusted brown apron and carries a board of statuettes of ancient Greek characters. These are an improvement on the previous “tawdry” stock of carrot-haired Queen Victorias, milk maids, poodles, Wesleys and parrots. He lists Arthur, Milton, Locke, Heracles, Abelard and Heloise, Cleopatra, Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon as being amongst his stock. Smith mulls the fact that the image seller might know the names of the figurines, but not their stories, and amuses us by contrasting the intellectual’s knowledge of these luminaries with the Italian Boy carrying them on top of his head.¹²⁶ Using information from the sources in Appendices I and II, I have so far identified over 200 subjects (ignoring, for example, different types of cat—sitting, lying, standing, nodding etc). The significance in listing these (Table 2), is that each one of those objects came with an intrinsic message provided by the makers and sellers (often, in the case of plaster of Paris images, the same people

I discuss parrots (p 231) and cats below (p 245). Other animals that are readily visible in contemporary illustrations include dogs, horses, sheep, pigs, birds, lions, chickens, cattle, rabbits and deer. The preponderance of domesticated animals amongst plaster images suggests that less well-off people were seeking links to a pastoral, or perhaps rural way of life. One that at the beginning of the nineteenth

¹²⁶ See Appendix II, p 181.

century would have been remembered by many workers who had moved to cities, but by the end of the century would have been a fantasy, a nostalgia for something never experienced. The same is true of Staffordshire figures, but these also include a greater number of wild beasts. More exotic animals are rarely mentioned as being sold by *figurinai*: occasionally a “giraffe” or a “lion” and a baboon.¹²⁷ This is strange, in that they copied and even made moulds of many Staffordshire originals. They were either responding to a lack of demand or these animals were simply not recorded.

Although it is difficult to judge which were “best-sellers,” assuming that image-sellers reacted to the demands of the market as well as influencing it, it is significant that the majority (41 per cent) of characters in Table 2 were celebrities, literary figures, actors and actresses, heroes and heroines and political figures. Classical figures made up some 35 per cent of characters, with religious figures trailing at 17 per cent. Given that there were fewer characters to choose from, the proportion of classical figures is highly suggestive of high levels of sales.

¹²⁷ See Appendix I, p 62.

Table 2: CHARACTERS SOLD BY FIGURINAI

Achilles*	Fisher Boy	Praying boy†
Admiral Hawke**	Flora*	Proserpina*
African Dancer	Friendship (boy and dog)	Psyche*
Aguinaldo**	Fruit	Rabbits
Ajax*	Garfield**	Roosters
Angels†	Garibaldi**	Queen Victoria**
Antonius*	General Blucher**	St Famile†
Apollo (Belvedere)*	General Grant**	St George†
Ariadne*	General Wolfe**	St John
Augustus*	George III**	Spring and Summer*
Bacchus*	Goats	St Famile†
Bayard**	Gladiator (Borghese?)*	St George†
Beethoven**	Houses	St John†
Berlin Horse*	Liberty*	St Joseph†
Bismarck**	Lincoln**Goethe**	St Paul†
Black Crook**	Greek Slave*	St Peter†
Battling Nelson**	Guardian Angel†	Samuel (praying, infant)†
Birds	Hercules*	Schiller**
Blucher	Holy Family†	Shakespeare**
Canova	Homer**	Sheep
Catholic Soldier†	Huguenot**	Shepherds
Cats	Jenny Lind**	Shepherdesses
Cherubs*	Jove*	Sheridan**
Christ†	Lera*	Sherman**
Clay**	Lions	Sleeping Beauty
Cleveland**	Lord Howe**	Socrates*
Clocks	Madame Vestris**	Spring and Summer*
Clytie*	Madonna (and child)†	Squirrels
Columbus**	Mars*	Syrens
Crucifix†	May Irwin**	Tam O'Shanter and Souter
Cupid*	McClellan**	Jonnie**
Cyrano de Bergerac**	Mercury*	The Bather*
Dan Webster**	Michelangelo	The Diver*
Dancing Girl*	Milton**	The Pope†
Dancing Nymphs*	Minerva*	The Republic (France)*
Daniel O'Connell**	Moses†	Three Graces*
Dante**	Mozart**	Tom Paine**
Daphnis (Prezieux)*	Mrs Carrie Nation**	Twin Fishers
Deer	Mrs Chadwick**	Victor Emmanuel**
Diana (Falguiere)*	Muses*	Voltaire**
Dickens**	Napoleon Bonaparte**	Wagner**
Dogs	Niobe*	Washington**
Douglas	Nymph and Satyr*	Watch stands
Dying Gladiator*	Parrots	Webster
Elgin marbles*	Paul Pry**	Wellington**
Egyptian Woman	Pegasus*	William J Bryan**
Etruscan horse	Phryne*	Winged Victory*
English horses	Pine cones	Woman bitten by Snake*
De la Fayette**	Pio Novo†	(Clesinger)
Figures by Messerschmidt*	Pope Leo†	Young Corbett**
	Pope Alexander†	

**"Classical" characters: 35%

**Literary figure, politician,
hero/heroine, celebrity: 41%† Religious (Christian) figures:
17%

8: The archaeology of the Plumtree Court mantelpiece III

“Excavating” the 1856 mantelpiece

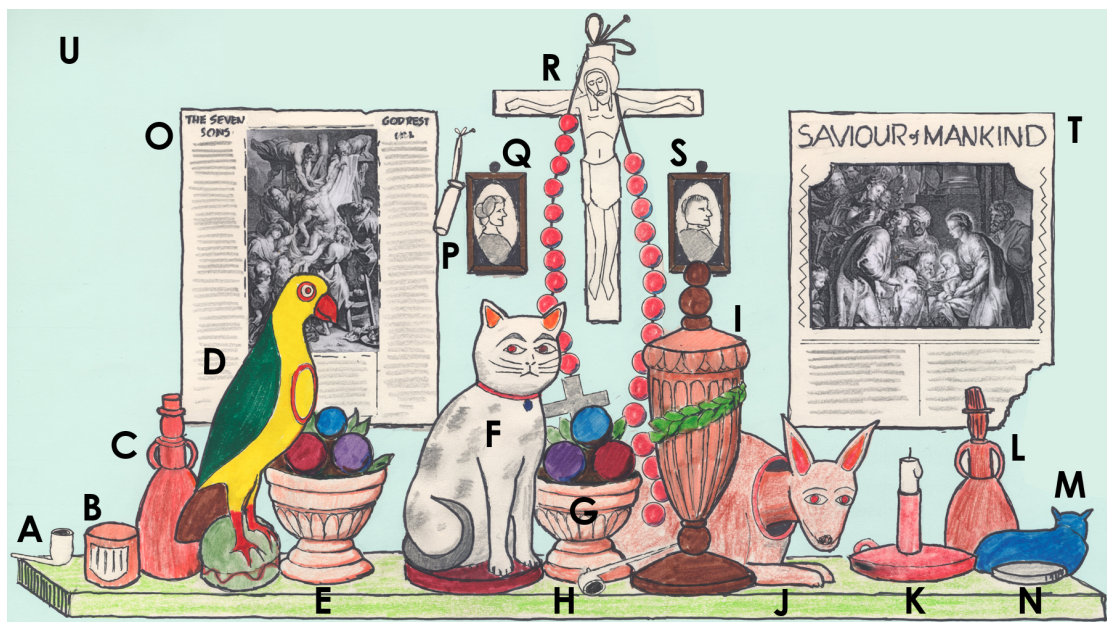


Figure 101: Simplified, coloured and numbered sketch of Godwin's illustration of a Plumtree Court mantelpiece.

The mantelpiece displays the following (left to right, Figure 101).

- A. An unidentifiable something, perhaps a clay pipe;
- B. A small crested/decorated cup or mug, perhaps a child's mug;
- C. A figure in the form of a woman, hands on hips (one of a pair);
- D. A figurine of a parrot;
- E. A bowl of fruit (one of a pair);
- F. A figurine of a cat;

- G. A second bowl of fruit, matching E;
- H. A clay pipe;
- I. An urn;
- J. A figurine of a nodding animal;
- K. A candlestick;
- L. A second figure of a woman with hands on hips, matching C;
- M. A small recumbent cat, facing away;
- N. A flat object, perhaps a strike-a-light or a pot lid.

Behind the mantelpiece

- O. A religious tract: *The Descent of Jesus from the Cross* (Rubens);
- P. A phial (holy water?);
- Q. A miniature portrait (one of a pair);
- R. A crucifix with rosary and small crucifix draped over it;
- S. A miniature portrait (second of pair);¹²⁸
- T. A religious print or tract: *Adoration of the Magi*;¹²⁹
- U. Wallpaper (with design of sailing boats?).

Note

For reasons of space and relevancy, only the decorative artefacts on the mantelpiece are further considered in this study. The remaining objects suggest that the household was a typical, not terribly well-off but not destitute, nineteenth-century one (candlestick rather than lamp, but wallpaper and portraits) that probably included both genders (clay pipe, though both sexes smoked pipes) and children (possible child's mug). It followed the Catholic faith (crucifix, rosary, holy water). The

¹²⁸ These may be silhouettes, although they appear to be more detailed.

¹²⁹ I have not been able to identify a parallel of this image; the infant Jesus' "star" halo could indicate a seventeenth century original painting or even a reproduction of a sculpture or altarpiece.

presence of Catholic paraphernalia might indicate that the household was an Irish one, or perhaps Italian. Both would fit the demographics of the area in the mid century. That the religious tracts on the wall were in English makes me lean towards the household being of Irish and/or English-speaking.

On the mantelpiece stand no fewer than eight objects that can be classified as miniatures (it is difficult to gauge the scale of the drawing, but I estimate the depth of the shelf to be approximately 10cm). Refer to Figure 101 for key letters.

Two matching figures

I have identified these two obscure objects (C and L) as either so-called “corn dollies” or pen wipers. In Godwin’s sketch they are shaded a dark colour to differentiate them from the plaster and ceramic objects, and they have a characteristic striped appearance that could indicate stems of wheat or barley. Corn dollies with humanoid designs were and are common, and examples of female with skirt, hands-on-hips and hat are still made today.¹³⁰ As symbols with pagan origins, their presence near orthodox Christian objects is interesting.

Alternatively, a US illustration of a crocheted pen wiper from 1898 also closely resembles the shape of the two mantelpiece objects (Figure 102). This is a racially-charged object in its US context, being presumably based on the Topsy character in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, but it is dangerous to ascribe similar meanings to it on a mid-century English mantelpiece. Harriet Beecher Stowe had published the novel in 1852, only a few years before Godwin’s visit. It may be that the crocheted figure was

¹³⁰ For example see <http://bigredbustouringco.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/koorda-corn-dolly-country.html>

a common design on both sides of the Atlantic well before it was given the “Topsy” name. It seems unlikely, however, that two pen wipers would be displayed on a mantelpiece. The figures may have been simply crocheted “dolls.”

Figure 102: Crocheted “Topsy penwiper” 1889.

https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/schmetterlingtag?ref=condensed_trust_header_title_items

A parrot

Parrots (D) were very popular figurines, both in plaster of Paris and ceramics (Figure 103). Familiar since medieval times, they were associated with the exotic, with sunshine, healing and status. They were also regarded as the bearers of good news, of being lucky, and were a symbol of eroticism, of sexual lust and longing (cf Gustave Courbet’s painting *Woman with Parrot*). However their ceramic or plaster of Paris incarnations were somewhat looked down on: Henry Mayhew, noted a “remarkable” improvement in both “images” and “casts” and “moulded” productions of all kinds...from the pristine rudeness of “green parrots.” This, he

wrote, was “creditable to the taste of working people, who are the chief purchasers of the smaller articles”(Mayhew 1851, 217).

Figure 103: Plaster-of Paris parrot, nineteenth century. This creature closely resembles the bird on Godwin’s mantelpiece, although the latter has a circular design on its breast.

<https://pookandpook.com/>

In George Cruickshank’s 1826 engraving of the eccentric seaman Billy Culmer (Figure 104), we not only see a cat sitting before the fire grate, but two splendid green and yellow parrots on the mantelpiece. Looking back from the twenty-first century, it might seem surprising that a plaster parrot, probably brightly painted, would stand on a nineteenth-century working-class mantelpiece. However parrots were familiar amongst urban alleys and rookeries in an age when animal welfare and veterinary concerns such as the spread of disease were rarely controlled. There are frequent records of parrots in middle-class settings, some of which are discussed and

illustrated by Mimi Matthews in her literary blog (Matthews 2015), and they are one of the most frequently illustrated “images” (see Figure 105).

Figure 104: *Billy Culmer and the Goose*. 1826, George Cruickshank (National Maritime Museum).

<http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/104310.html>

“Poll Parrot” was amongst the stock in trade of one Antonio Bajocchi, who sold plaster images in mid-century New York, an activity that made him “a rich man.”¹³¹ Huckleberry Finn noted two plaster parrots in the Grangerfords’ home: “Well, there was a big outlandish parrot on each side of o’clock, made out of something like chalk, and painted up gaudy. But one of the parrots was a cat made of crockery, and a crockery dog by the other; and when you pressed down of them they squeaked, but didn’t open their mouths nor look different nor interested” (Twain 1884).

¹³¹ See Appendix II, p 205.

Figure 105: Parrots depicted in the stock-in-trade of image-sellers (details). See Appendix I for original illustrations/URLs.

William Hone, tongue in cheek, wrote in 1837 of the “barbarous parrot” “Poll” (Figure 106), helpfully informing us not only of its approximate form, but also of its colouring (note the mention of the large eyes):¹³²



Figure 106: William Hone’s “Parrot” (Hone 1837, 172).

*This representative of the most “popular” of “all the winged inhabitants of the air,” might have been taken for the likeness of some species between an owl and the booby-bird; but then the wings and back were coloured with a lively green, and the under part had yellow streaks, and the beak was of a red colour, and any colour did for the eyes, if they were larger than they ought to have been.*¹³³

¹³² See page 401 for discussion.

¹³³ “All the winged inhabitants of the air” is a quotation from Genesis 1:20; a “booby” is a sea bird. For more, see Appendix II, p 175.

An urn

“Urn” probably originated from the Latin *urna*, a jar. This is complicated by the fact that a jar could be used to contain the ashes of the dead, and *urere*, to burn, was used to describe a vessel intended to contain cremated bone. The presence of an urn (I) on a mantelpiece is therefore laden with morbid possibilities. Urns are everywhere in Victorian cemeteries, but the urn as a device was favoured by architects and furniture makers as a decorative element unrelated to death. Urns were often paradoxically present on graveyard monuments where bodies were buried, not cremated.

Marshall Colman puzzles over these contradictions in his *Hand Eye Foot Brain* blog, pointing out that: “when the urn was most common in British funerary art, cremation was illegal” (Colman 2012). Colman gives up looking for a definitive interpretation, but Judith Cushman Hammer, on the other hand, suggests that the urn is simply a “brand”, a sort of badge of antiquity: “an ornament like a carved urn on a chair back...was simply a sign of the venerable ancient world and hence of the fashionable taste of the chair’s proprietor,” someone who saw in the device “noble simplicity, beauty and reason” (Hammer 2012). The urn is also “a symbol for a house or dwelling” according to the web site of Lakewood Cemetery, Minneapolis, (Anon 2010a). It was seen as representing the body, a container for the soul, as symbolising immortality and the afterlife.

Figure 107: Urns depicted in the stock-in-trade of image-sellers (details). See Appendix I for original illustrations/URLs.

Urns as symbols form part of James Deetz and Edwin Dethlefsen's seminal exploration of the cemeteries of eastern Massachusetts, a 1960s archaeological field project that helped to establish historical archaeology as a solid academic and practical pursuit. They noted, both qualitatively and quantitatively, that different symbols, the death's head, cherub and urn, achieved maximum popularity at different times and in different places and can indicate the temporal and geographical ebbing and flowing of "cultural processes" (Deetz and Dethlefsen 1967).

It may be that the Plumtree Court householder was thinking about "noble simplicity, beauty and reason," but it is also likely that they simply associated the urn with the ancient world and its values. They would have seen urns in cemeteries, but perhaps just as often as elements of friezes and as finials on buildings.

A pair of fruit bowls

Bowls of fruit (E and G) were popular miniatures (Figure 108). Bowls overflowing with luscious fruit were frequent subjects for still-lives from the seventeenth century onwards, paintings generally created for upper- and middle-class audiences. While engravings may have made their way onto some working-class walls, these were likely to have been uncoloured and not very exciting. Three-dimensional bowls of fake fruit, often miniaturised, were to be found on the boards of image sellers and on their customers' mantelpieces.

Figure 108: Plaster of Paris fruit bowl, nineteenth century.

<https://pookandpook.com/>

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the availability of fruit was seasonal: apples, August to May; cherries May-July; gooseberries June-August; plums and greengages July-September (Clayton and Rowbotham 2009). Henry Mayhew lists currants, strawberries amongst “tender” fruits (that have to be eaten immediately). He also mentions, amongst other “green” fruits (that are ripe and fresh when sold) “pine-apples, melons, grapes, chestnuts, coker-nuts, Brazilnuts, hazel-nuts, and oranges”, as well as raspberries, apricots, damsons and lemons, red white and blackcurrants, pears, mulberries and grapes (Mayhew 1851, 79). Clayton and Rowbotham suggest in their paper that the diet of working-classes declined rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Mayhew reported that by the 1850s costermongers were selling less and less fruit to the working classes. The more exotic fruits would have been bought as occasional treats, and by the slice.

Figure 109: Bowl of fruit on image-seller's tray, 1835.

See Appendix I for original illustration/URL.

Judith Flanders claims that “Many thought fruit, particularly fresh fruit, to be unwholesome” (Flanders 2003, 225) though I wonder if that “many” applied mostly to middle classes. Flanders quotes Gwen Raverat, whose family thought fruit to be “a pleasant treat but rather dangerous.” However Mrs Beeton recommended displays of fruit that resembled, admittedly with a little artistic licence, the plaster of Paris objects on the Plumtree Court mantelpiece (Figure 110).



Figure 110: *Dish of mixed fruit.* 1859-61 *The Book of Household Management.* Mrs Isabella Beeton.

The gaudily- and probably unrealistically-coloured fruits would have added cheerful, exotic gaiety to the mantelpiece, along with the parrot and urn. It might be

imagined that they represented delicacies that would have only occasionally, if ever, have featured in the household's diet.

Three cats

A nodding cat (J)

This creature is a “nodder” (Figure 111). The head, which has an internal counterbalance, is suspended from a loop inside the neck, allowing it to move up and down. Nodders were mentioned by several contemporary writers. Hone writes in 1836 of a cat that “moved its chalk head, to the wonder and delight of all urchins, until they informed themselves of its ‘springs of action,’ at the price of ‘only a penny,’ and, by breaking it, discovered that the nodding knob achieved un-cat-like motion, by being hung with a piece of wire to the interior of its hollow body.”¹³⁴ *Der deutsche Hausfreund* mentions “*ein wachelnder Zwerg*” (a nodding gnome) in 1843.¹³⁵

Eduard Charton, in an 1850 edition of *Le Magazin Pittoresque*, writes of “*les chiens à têtes mouvantes*.”¹³⁶ Henry Mayhew compares, in 1865, the nodding heads of “aged dames” with “so many plaster casts of cats with movable necks.”¹³⁷ In 1884 Chicago, a stock of figures included cats, each of which “had a queer expression in its eyes, as if it was tired of continually nid-nodding at the multitude.”¹³⁸ In the Italian fairy story *Il Gattino di Gesso*, “*gatti e conigli crollavano il capo e parevano vivi*,” and the

¹³⁴ See Appendix II, p 176.

¹³⁵ See Appendix II, p 185.

¹³⁶ See Appendix II, p 193.

¹³⁷ See Appendix II, p 210.

¹³⁸ See Appendix II, p 236.

French folklorist C. Gardel, looking back at the nineteenth century from 1939, recalled “*petits lapins blancs à collier pointillé de rouge, dans lequel balançait la tête.*”¹³⁹

Figure 111: Plaster of Paris “nodder,” nineteenth century.

<https://pookandpook.com/>

Figure 112: “Nodder” visible in Vernet’s pre-1816 illustration.¹⁴⁰

<http://parismuseescollections.paris.fr/fr/musee-carnavalet/oeuvres/marchand-de-figures-de-platre-57>

¹³⁹ For *Il Gattino di Gesso* see Appendix II, p 262; for Gardel, see Appendix II, p 291.

¹⁴⁰ See Appendix I, p 24.

A recumbent cat (M)

This object is almost impossible to identify confidently, but recumbent cats were common products of Staffordshire potteries (Figure 113), usually depicted lying on cushions.

Figure 113: Staffordshire potteries recumbent cat.

<http://www.antiquepottery.co.uk/antique-pottery-and-ceramics/d/antique-staffordshire-pottery-figure-of-a-black-and-white-cat-mid-19thc/176727>

A sitting cat (F)

The cat (Figure 114) sits upright on its haunches, its tail curled around its back, front legs straight. Its body bears a rough scatter of splodges. Its eyes are large, and it has distinct eyebrows. Several lines, meant to represent whiskers, are painted on its face. It sits on a flat base. I've left this creature to last because, though it's not particularly spectacular, nor an object of great beauty or sophistication, it is almost certainly a *gatto lucchesi*, a plaster of Paris cat from Lucca.



Figure 114: Cat, *A Chimney-Piece in Plumtree-court, Holborn 1856* (Detail) (Godwin).

It acts as a vital link between the *figurinae* I introduced in the previous section, and important elements of working-class material culture that extend from Plumtree Court, across London and Britain to Europe, to North and South America and as far as Australia and New Zealand. It also underlines the paradox that this class of decorative objects was hugely popular at the time, and yet has been overlooked by most researchers.

The cat connection

Perhaps no creature in the animal kingdom has inspired such extreme emotions as the cat

(Anon 2015b)

Figure 115: Girl with miniature cat, nineteenth century.

<http://blog.thevintageworkshop.com>

The cat, in its miniature, ceramic or plaster of Paris representations (Figure 115), played an important role in the lives of nineteenth-century working-class people.



Figure 116: Old Blue China. (Twain 1880, 187).

In his satirical romp *A Tramp Abroad*, Mark Twain introduces us to “a rare relic” (Figure 116), an “exquisite specimen of Old Blue China.” This delightful object, “considered to be the finest example of Chinese art now in existence,” was, of course, a cat. Twain was making fun of “bricabrackery” and the gullibility of those who believed cheap and cheerful knick-knacks to be immensely valuable (Twain 1880, 187).¹⁴¹ But he chose an example that would have resonated throughout the nineteenth century, almost certainly the late eighteenth century and definitely to the present day, when cats are probably the most popular Internet “meme.”¹⁴²

It is often wryly remarked in polite 21st century company that it is ironic that the acme of technological advance – the computer, smartphone or tablet networked with the worldwide web – should be more often than not be used merely to watch short videos of cute or funny or grumpy cats (see Bustillos 2015 and very many others). This predilection for the feline species is not a new phenomenon, as is underlined by the fascination such early cultures as pharaonic Egypt had for the

¹⁴¹ See p 377.

¹⁴² *Whats.com* defines an Internet meme as “a cultural phenomenon that spreads from one person to another online” (<http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Internet-meme>).

animal. But by the nineteenth century, according to some writers, the cat been relegated to a lesser role.

The cat conundrum

“Cats are of course a common animal and are usually found overall glazed in brown” writes H.A.B. Turner in 1971. “‘Jackfield’ black glaze over red earthenware cats are almost as common as their brown brother and sisters, and it is probable that these were intended to stand in the hearth either side of the fire as were the dogs” (Turner 1971, 206-7). A couple of sentences later, Turner puzzles that “It is strange to us that cats are approximately a hundred times as rare as dogs.” This he suggests was due to the “more rural nature of the country” where cats, mostly ignored, were “relatively unseen” as they went about their business of destroying vermin. Turner thought that as pets in urban environments “in Victorian times as were by no means as numerous...and this would account for the 1/100 ratio of pottery rarity of cats to dogs which we find so surprising” (Turner 1971, 208).

An apparent lack of interest in cats during the nineteenth century is reflected by A. and N. Harding’s survey of *Victorian Staffordshire Figures 1835-1875*, in which, though the title page carries an image of a cat, some 56 pages of illustrations of examples of dogs are followed by a mere 3½ pages of cats. The Hardings considered that “all figures of cats are rare” (Harding 1998, 236). One of the figures bears a strong resemblance to the typical stance of a plaster of Paris cat, though it is significant that “this figure is extremely rare” (Harding 1998, Figure 2881, 239). The example is finely modelled, with a realistic face and a distinct collar. Those

illustrated are mostly decorated with irregular blobs of colour, as were the plaster of Paris cats.

In her book on Staffordshire figures, *People, Passions, Pastimes and Pleasures*, Myrna Schkolne suggests that cats were little appreciated in the early nineteenth century. “Because they were of no use in sport or farming, cats afforded their owners neither prestige or profit” and so “were among Britain’s most overlooked animals...the disinterest in cats is reflected in the dearth of realistic earthenware representations of them from this period” (Schkolne 2006, 230). Turner, the Hardings and Schkolne relied on Staffordshire products for their comments on the scarcity of cats. It seems that these animals, along with other familiar beasts, had already appeared on mantelpieces at least as early as the mid eighteenth century. In North America, Henry Christian Geyer advertised plaster of Paris busts of famous public figures as well as “Images, Birds, Cats, Dogs, and all other sorts of curious Animals, all of Plaster of Paris” as early as 1768 (Dow 1927, 284).¹⁴³ If this menagerie was present in the colonies during the second half of the eighteenth century then they had almost certainly been present in the Old World before then. This is supported by some early illustrations. Bewick’s woodcut of an image-seller, probably created in the late eighteenth century, includes three cats, including one that is sitting upright (Figure 117). Rowlandson includes at least one cat on his 1799 *Image Seller’s* board (Figure 118). A second figure may also be a cat.

¹⁴³ See also Appendix II, p 164.



Figure 117: Detail of Bewick woodcut.

Figure 118: Detail of Rowlandson caricature. (See Appendix I)

Paola Sensi-Isolani, writes that: “the first and most popular statuette produced and marketed appears to have been that of a sitting cat whose simple lines allowed for easy reproduction. These cats were sometimes decorated or tinted with lamp smoke” (Sensi-Olani 1990, 98). So well known did these plaster of Paris cats become that the name *gatto lucchesi* – a cat from Lucca – became a sort of trademark. The early examples, according to Sensi-Isolani, “displayed a certain artistic sense and fineness of craftsmanship typical of the earlier statuettes and seldom found in the *figurina*’s later production” (Ibid, 98) (Figure 119).

Figure 119: Eighteenth century plaster of Paris cats, *Museo della Figurina di Gesso e dell'Emigrazione*.

<http://www.luccaterre.it/en/dettaglio/2866/Museo-della-Figurina-di-Gesso-e-dell-Emigrazione.html>

The feline race

Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper, in 1853, mourned the loss of “the old British image-seller, who was accustomed—at the due season—to appear in our streets with plaster-cats upon his head—white cats spotted with black wafer” who was, according to the paper “destroyed by the Italian image man.”¹⁴⁴ Just as homegrown peddlers were not able to compete with the influx of *figurinai*, perhaps the home potteries, too, decided not to compete with cheaper cats sold by the Italians.

Twain’s choice of a cat would have brought a wry smile to the face of William Hone, who in 1837 had written, also with humour, about several “chalk” figures of “the feline race” in his article *Nature and Art*, and included an illustration of an example (Figure 120).



Figure 120: William Hone’s cat. (Hone 1837, 173).

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix II, p 198.

One of three that ranged from a nodder down to a specimen worth only a farthing, Hone's cat, which, he tells us, the illustrator was unable to draw badly enough to represent the original, had been sold by "Italian lads" (Hone 1837, 173).¹⁴⁵

Allowing for some artistic licence, and the sketchiness of the images, William Hone's cat is remarkably like the animal on Godwin's chimney-piece. Hone was writing about objects familiar "in my day", that is, from his past. Hone lived from 1780 to 1842, and his periodical was published in 1825-6, so it is likely that he was remembering his array of cats from about 1800. His artist sketched a cat 20 or so years later, and Godwin's illustrator drew the chimney-piece after another 30 years had passed.

In 1890, across the Atlantic, an illustrator drew a census enumerator at work in the tenements of New York (Figure 121). In the background is a mantelpiece, and on the mantelpiece has been placed a figurine of a miniature cat. The "ordinary" people in the illustration, who were recent German immigrants, will almost certainly have bought the cat from an itinerant street seller, a familiar sight in the city.



Figure 121: Cat figurine on mantelpiece of New York tenement 1890 (detail) *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

¹⁴⁵ See Appendix II, p 176.

The inhabitants of Liberia, many of them freed slaves, had, in 1878, “familiar plaster of Paris images, dogs and cats on the mantels.”¹⁴⁶ *The Highland Weekly News* in 1880 Ohio warned men that their wives might exchange their overcoat for “a plaster-of-paris cat in seven colours, and make home beautiful.”¹⁴⁷ “In 1884, Mark Twain had Huckleberry Finn pressing down on a mantelpiece cat made of crockery, which squeaked, but like the adjacent dog “didn’t open [its mouth] nor look different nor interested.”¹⁴⁸

As an example of a parallel middle-class obsession, Mrs Agnes Repplier, a noted Philadelphia essayist, never married, but by 1900, at the age of 45, had assembled a collection of 39 cats: “and there isn’t a live one in the lot. They are mostly plaster casts and images that have been presented to her by friends.”¹⁴⁹ She died in 1955 aged 95, so probably possessed even more “images” of cats by then.

Figure 122: Cat and Staffordshire dog on mantelpiece in New York tenement. Early twentieth century. New York Public Library.

¹⁴⁶ Appendix II, p 227.

¹⁴⁷ Appendix II, p 228.

¹⁴⁸ See Appendix II, p 238.

¹⁴⁹ See Appendix II, p 272.

Figure 123: Cats among the stock in trade of image-sellers

See Appendix I for original illustrations/URLs

Some 30 years after Godwin's artist sketched a seated cat on the Plumtree Court mantelpiece, True Williams drew an *Italian Image Boy* for the US children's publication *Belfords's Annual*. On his board sits a cat (Figure 123) in almost the same pose.

The original popularity of the cat as ornament might be attributed to a simple matter of expediency. The form of a sitting cat is relatively simple to carve, mould and cast. The resulting figure has few projecting features and doesn't need reinforcing. It is therefore reasonably robust and easy to transport. Decorating the

cast is also not particularly challenging. Many were decorated by simply holding them over a smoky lamp or candle, which left blurred grey-black “spots.” Others were painted. Colours were garish and patterns, often stripes and circular spots, very un cat-like. Some were given a complete coat of paint, a second painted pattern and then varnished or shellacked. When painted, the eyes were usually large, with prominent eyebrows, and a few lines applied to the face to represent whiskers.

Cats went through several phases of notoriety over the millennia. Their usefulness in catching vermin probably led to them being elevated to the position of demi-gods in ancient Egypt. Later, especially during the Medieval period, they became associated with witchcraft, being regarded as “familiars.” By the eighteenth century cats were once again in favour, and the “Catsmeatdogsmeat man” became familiar in city streets. Mlle Lambert told Jean-Sebastien Marcoux, during his investigation of memory associated with the material culture of the home, that she regarded her ornament of a sleeping cat as “a ‘piece’ of the house.” Marcoux wrote that Lambert considered the cat to be “not a simple brick, but ‘the soul of the house’” (Marcoux 2001, 74). David Zax, writing at Smithsonian.com, posits that cats are still associated with evil, asking “how often do you see a movie’s maniacal arch-villain, as he lounges in a comfy chair and plots the world’s destruction, stroke the head of a Golden Retriever?” (Zax 2007).

Wendy Christensen describes cats as “a presence.” She suggests that “it was in the nineteenth century, and particularly in the Victorian era, that the domestic cat was

finally restored to something like his old position of esteem...Victorian Britons, under the tutelage of their queen, cherished home, family, the domestic arts, and, increasingly, cats” (Christensen 2014). In her book *The Cat and the Human Imagination*, Katherine Rogers discusses many two-dimensional representations of cats, but doesn’t touch on the third dimension. She does include a telling, within my argument, quotation from Christopher Smart, who, writing in 1763 of his cat *Jeoffry*, tells us that he is admired:

For he keeps the Lord’s watch in the night against the adversary:

For he counteract the powers of darkness by his electrical skin & and glaring eyes.

For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life.

For in the morning orisons he loves the sun and the sun loves him.

(quoted by Rogers 1998, 90)

The poem of course closely links the cat with the devout Smart’s Christian God, but as with so many aspects of all religions, there are echoes of much earlier beliefs. The night was regarded as a time of danger from the earliest times, when evil was liable to be abroad in whatever form it took. The cat’s eyesight fitted it for the task of standing guard. The cat on the mantelpiece, with its large, wide eyes, is acting as a symbolic stand-in for a live animal. Smart also tells us that the cat “...is good to think on, if a man would express himself neatly” (see *Superstition*, p 401).

“A well-fed cat is a fairly inactive creature” (Serpell 1996, 17). The presence of a cat on the mantelpiece might indicate that the household is not wanting for food, with enough left over to satisfy a (virtual) pet: a tangible measure of material

achievement. Serpell also writes of the importance of the shared “gaze” between human and animal (Serpell 1996, 137), and while a living animal might have a short attention span, the “frank and detached” gaze of a cat, transferred to an ornament, is unflinching and self-satisfied, reflecting the peace and stability of the home.

Cats and the home

“As the household cat became an object of affection, it came to embody the Victorian ideal of Home. The cat was still economically important as a rodent catcher, because modern pesticides and building standards had not yet been developed; but most writers preferred to present it as a hearthside spirit rather than a predator. From a useful household pest controller, the cat became an embodiment of domestic virtue” (Rogers 1998, 101). It has been suggested that gender played a part in this popularity. “Despite the popularity of feminine puppy faces, the cat, more than the dog concept, epitomize women’s animal nature in the 19th century...lazing or sleeping, squirming or mischievous, fluffy white balls or dark and wiry nightstalkers (or a little of each), the cat seem to embody all the apparent contradictions of femininity for nineteenth-century artists” (Charnon-Deutsch 2010, 45).

Kathleen Kate feels able to claim that the cat was: “...the anti-pet of nineteenth-century bourgeois life, associated with sexuality and marginality, qualities the cat inherited from medieval and early modern times when cats were sometimes burned as witches. Inverted, the tradition persisted in the nineteenth century, since cats were embraced by intellectuals” (Kate 1994, 115). She continues: “The cat was

sexually charged, independent, dangerous, egotistical, and cruel. By the end of the century, however, it had become a family pet. It had gained a modern pedigree. Breeds were now important as the cat took its place in bourgeois life alongside the dog. Indeed, it came to act as a dog did, in the determining imagination of pet owners. The cat was neutralized—‘rehabilitated,’ in a telling phrase” (Kate 1994, 116). It is unlikely that these potent symbolisms were present in our Holborn ally, but it is apparent that cats were a well-established part of the domestic scene, as living creatures basking in the warmth of the fire or as miniature representations. Intellectuals may indeed have embraced them later, but if the choice of products of image-sellers were anything to go by, they already meant much to working-class people by the end of the eighteenth century.

A widely-cited RSPCA tract published in 1857 reported that in working class areas “almost every home had a cat” (Kean 1998, 161). The existence of the “catsmeat man” suggested that these cats weren’t always left to fend for themselves. But it can’t be ignored that cats were often treated horribly by present-day standards. They were routinely tortured by children (and adults) as casually evidenced by some of Bewicks’s woodcuts. There was also a minor trade in their pelts.

Most importantly for this research is that the cat on the mantelpiece would not have been there at all if the householder did not in some way invest it with “catness” – the agency of cat – or that the figurine possessed its own “catness” agency which had attracted its owner. The Plumtree Court cats would otherwise have been rather pointless, poorly moulded and garishly decorated lumps of plaster of Paris. Given the presence of the cats on the mantelpieces of so many homes it can be suggested that

working class people had a different, closer, stronger, more affectionate relationship with these animals than has previously been assumed. The cat figurines would have added more than just a dotted white patch of colour to their rooms.

Image-sellers may have influenced this positive attitude towards cats, and were probably proactively marketing them. To earn their nickname of “Gipskatter”, in Sweden the peddlers had presumably had been shouting something like “Plaster cats for sale!” (*Gips katter till salu!*) or “Come buy my plaster cats!” (*Köp min gips Katter!*). *Gipskatter* (plaster cat) and *Katzelmacher* (cat/kitten maker) were used as pejorative terms for Italians in Sweden and Germany respectively well into the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰ This is an important point: if the image-sellers encouraged the desire for and delight in miniature cats, they probably had the same effect when promoting figurines of gods and goddesses and their roll call of celebrities (Table 1).

Once upon a time...

The connection between real and fictional cats and magic is strong, and that connection appears to be shared by ornamental cats. The Italian fairytale *Il gattino di gesso*, from the collection *Il Raccontafiabe* (The Fairytale Teller) edited by Luigi Capuana in 1894, tells of a plaster of Paris nodding cat that not only repairs itself when dropped, but is eventually revealed to be a prince transformed by a witch.¹⁵¹ The cat is, conveniently, bought from a *figurinaio* by a princess, who goes on, with the help of her plaster cat, to destroy the witch and free the prince, and of course they marry and live happily ever afterwards.

¹⁵⁰ *Katzelmacher* is only one of a number of suggested etymologies for this word, which appears to predate the arrival of plaster of Paris cats. Like many slang words these were in time applied to any foreigner and to travelling people.

¹⁵¹ Luigi Capuana (1839-1915) was an Italian writer, journalist and critic.

Il gattino di gesso

C'era una volta un figurinaio che andava attorno per le vie vendendo figurine di gesso:

"Chi vuol figurine, chi vuole!"

Su la tavola che portava in testa sopra un cercine, vecchi panciuti, gatti e conigli crollavano il capo e parevano vivi.

"Chi vuol figurine, chi vuole!"¹⁵²

(Capuana 1894, 137)

The tale is full of familiar fairy tale imagery: the magic self-healing object that can communicate (using nods), a princess and prince, a transformation into a cat, an evil sorceress, a trial abroad (the princess has to retrieve the three gold coins with which her father bought the magic cat in order to break the spell), a girl dressed as a boy (she travels in disguise), falling in with thieves and bandits, the princess humbled (she is forced to act as a servant), a final battle with the witch which ends with the witch turning into a mouse, the prince catching it, cutting off its tail and burning it. The plaster cat is regarded as valueless ("I wouldn't give a penny for it") by most of the people the princess-in-disguise comes across, and of course it only nods when it is near one of the gold coins. An Italian fairy story featuring a plaster of Paris cat and a *figurinaio* links neatly with the largest cat on George Godwin's chimney-piece. This apparently insignificant sketch of a rather prosaic object on a mantelpiece in an almost-demolished London alley lies at the centre of a network of connections that extends halfway around the world. Far away from Holborn, in Södervika, north of

¹⁵² *The Plaster Kitten: Once upon a time there was a figurinaio who went about the streets selling plaster figurines: "Figurines, who wants my figurines!" On the tray on his head, pot-bellied cats and rabbits nodded their heads and seemed alive. "Figurines, who wants my figurines!" [my translation] See Appendix II, p 261 for more.*

Uppsala In Sweden, Johanna Modin, born in 1852, grew up in a home that included a plaster cat (Figure 3) that was/is almost identical to that on the mantelpiece in Plumtree Court. The hollow figure contains a note from a previous owner recounting its history (Janssen 2011).

Figure 124: Statue outside the *Museo della figurina di gesso e dell'emigrazione*, holding a figurine of a cat.

<https://www.toscanaovunquebella.it/it/coreglia-antelminelli/patria-del-figurinaio>

The full extent of miniature cattery is indicated by the collection of the *Museo della Figurina di Gesso e dell'Emigrazione*. Outside the museum stands a statue of an Image Man, cradling a cat in his right arm (Figure 124), and in its gift shop are displayed cats cast yesterday (Figure 125).

Figure 125: Contemporary reproductions of cats for sale in *Museo della Figurina di Gesso e dell'Emigrazione*.

<http://www.luccaterre.it/en/dettaglio/2866/Museo-della-Figurina-di-Gesso-e-dell-Emigrazione.html>

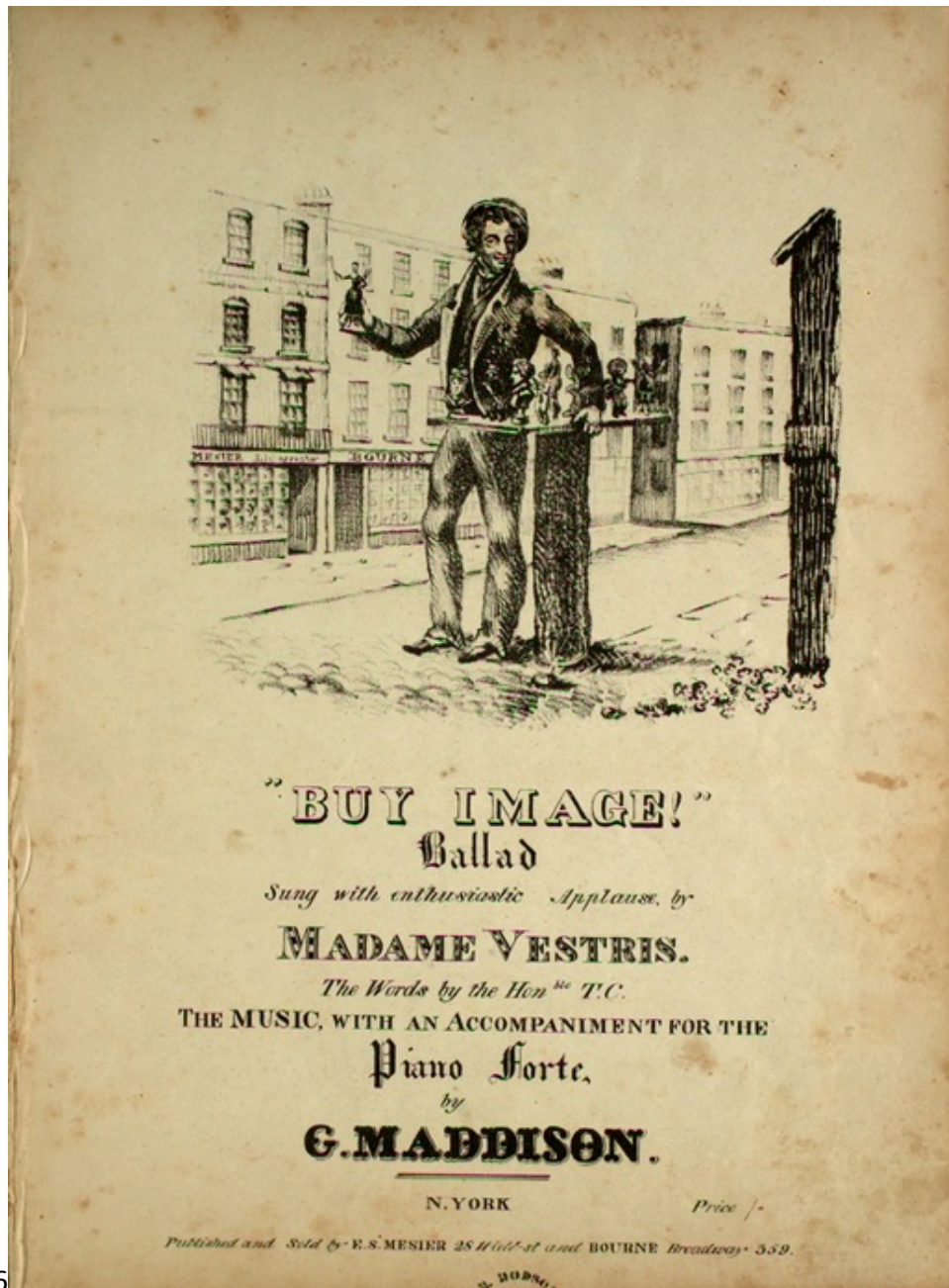


Figure 126: An image seller with a tray of (probably nodding) cats on his head, 1843
Punch or the London Charivari, p 199.

9: *Buy Image!*

The archaeology of a ballad

Singing about miniatures



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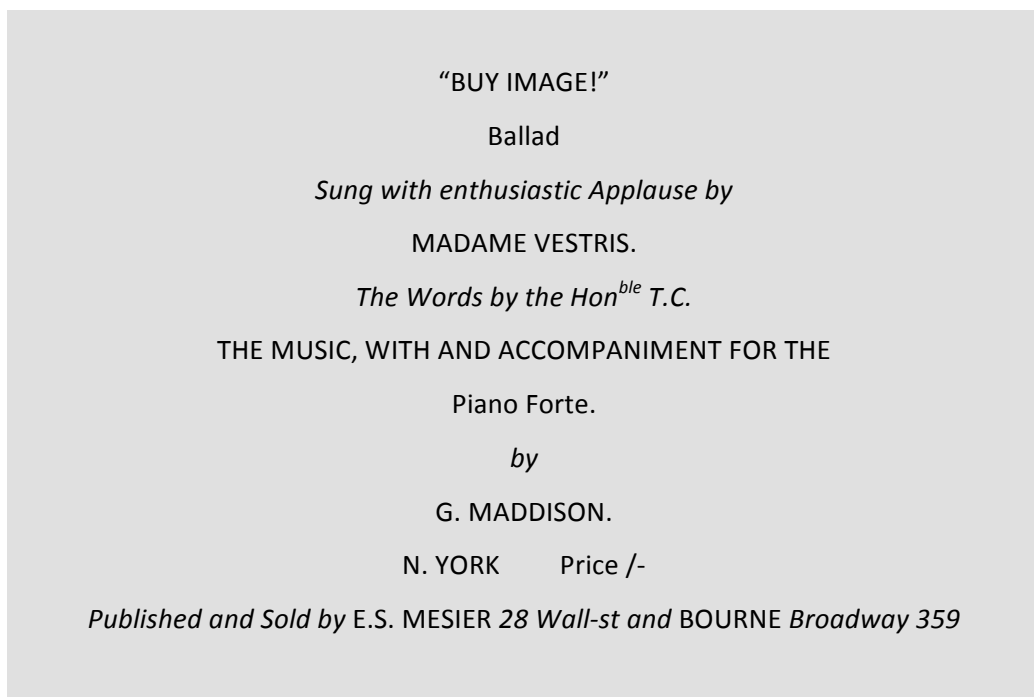
Figure 127: The cover of the sheet music for the song *Buy Image*.

The Lester S. Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University.

The figure of the (often Italian) image seller was a conventional sight in metropolitan street life, sufficient to generate a mid-nineteenth century sub-genre of songs about the type in which the seller shows off his figures of leading individuals of the age and provides a satirical commentary on them

(McWilliam 2005, 109)

In one of those serendipitous leaps that make research so exciting, in the midst of spotted cats and green parrots, I stumbled (online) across a very special piece of old sheet music. It's stained yellow and foxed by time, but is now preserved in the Lester S. Levy collection of sheet music at Johns Hopkins University. Because I accessed it virtually (as a high resolution pdf kindly provided by the library), I couldn't touch or smell its seven pages, but I'm guessing that the paper is stiff, fragile, crumbly and musty. There is concentration of stains on the edges of its pages, presumably from fingers that turned them in the past.



On the cover is a typically nineteenth century mish-mash of type fonts (eight different fonts in eleven lines). Above the title is an engraving of a smiling man, his

hat set at a rakish angle, his short jacket stylishly-waisted and lapelled. In his right hand he holds aloft a miniature female figurine, while his left hand rests on a tray of his wares. He's a seller of "images", whose street cry of "Buy Image!" inspired the song.

"*Buy Image!*" is an undated "ballad". It has a pleasant rolling tune and simple piano accompaniment by one G. Maddison, an apparently forgotten composer (I have so far found only find a single reference to a composer named "G. Maddison," a mention in *Harmonicon* of 1830). I have digitised the melody (see www.ralphmills.com/PhD.html for audio file). This is almost certainly the first time the music has been heard for nearly 200 years, for the ballad, although popular enough to have existed in sheet form both sides of the Atlantic, has left no other (so far) obvious traces.

"Buy Image!" lyrics

The lyrics, by "the Honorable T.C." (another long-forgotten individual), sound odd to 21st-century ears, but are nevertheless fascinating, informative and relevant to my study (original spelling and punctuation):

Buy Image buy Image Buy Image buy Buy Image

fair la--dies of me...

I sell them so cheep don't refuse me,

I sell them so cheep don't refuse me,

They're the prettiest thing in the World that can be,

*To place on your shelf and amuse ye
They're the prettiest thing in the World that can be
To place on your shelf and a-muse ye.*

*I've Cupids so small you can put a-ny where
No La-dy should ere be with-out him
He'll go in your pock-et and safe-ly rest there,
Shoud your Mother or Aunt scold a--bout him*

*Buy, Image buy Image: Buy buy Image fair La-dies of me, Buy Image, Buy
Image.*

*Buy Image buy Image Buy buy Image Buy Image
I've such pretty toys
For ev'ry ones fan-cy to muse on
For ev'ry ones fancy to muse on
There's a Venus Paul Pry
And don't little Boys,
For old maiden ladies to chuse from
There's a Venus Paul Pry,
And dear little Boys,
For old maiden ladies to chuse from.¹⁵³*

¹⁵³ Note: "don't" is almost certainly a misprint of "dear"

I've Birds and I've Swains that will ne-ver take flight

Depend where you place them they'll stay

And be quite contented so pretty, and bright,

If you give them a dust once a day.....

If you give them a dust once a day...

If you give them a dust once a day.....

Buy Image Buy Image Buy I-mage fair Ladies of me Buy Image Buy Image.

I especially like the final lines, those that mention “dusting”!

“Buy Image!” lyrics excavated

The hawker begins by suggesting that his anticipated audience is predominantly female, “fair ladies”, that his figurines are “cheep” and that these pretty things are intended to be displayed, for the amusement of those ladies, on their shelves, presumably mantelpieces.

Cupids:

The image seller suggests that the “Cupids” he sells are small enough to go anywhere, including a pocket, to avoid the censure of mothers and aunts. This suggests that these particular miniatures are meant to be portable and had meanings that might be interpreted as improper by censorious adults. In the early nineteenth century most women’s pockets were still separate from other garments, rather in the manner of small handbags, though were generally worn between outer clothing and petticoats. It was, however, beginning to be more common to find

pockets sewn into seams (Anon 2016a). However the pocket was worn, it is unlikely that anything other than very small figures could or would be carried in them.

The song tantalisingly doesn't provide us with any clues as to the significance of tiny Cupids that had to be hidden from disapproving mothers and aunts. Cupid was, of course, a very popular two-dimensional image on Valentine cards. The figure being offered for sale in Appendix I, Figure A1.69, p 92, is identified as a Cupid, and Cupids are mentioned nine times in the texts listed in Appendix II. Whether these would have been pocket-sized is not clear, and plaster figures would not have been portable in this sense. In the early twentieth century, "Cupid dolls" were handed out as prizes at fairs, and these were then passed on as love tokens: "There was one game [at the 1920s fair] all the boys liked to play because if they won, they got a Cupid doll. Then they would give their girl-friend the Cupid doll. There were a lot of girls carrying around those dolls, and I wanted one so bad" (Neville 2002, 86). It is likely that this behaviour was based on much earlier traditions, but I have yet to find a nineteenth century reference. Contemporary ceramic Cupid figures are not easily identifiable, and those that have survived are too large to fit in an average pocket.

The excavation of pre-1914 debris of German ceramic factories have produced huge numbers of tiny bisque figures many of which online sellers identify as "Cupids", and significantly these figures appear to merge with figures otherwise identified as "crude white porcelain figures" or "Frozen Charlottes" (see page 47). The "Cupids" referred to in the ballad therefore might be early examples of these mysterious figurines.

Venus:

Venus, whether the Medici Venus or the Venus de Milo, or any other naked or semi-naked female figure that could be given her name, was one of the most popular figurines during the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁴ For my discussion of this phenomenon, see below, p 319.

Little boys:

“Dear little boys” could apply to a number of figurines, but at the time the song was being written, we know that a matching pair of figures of a boy reading and another writing were the rage (*see p 369 and Figure 187*). The reference to them being collected by “old maiden ladies” is perhaps instructive, and links nineteenth century behaviours with those of today’s elderly ladies, the denizens of charity shops.

Birds and Swains:

“Birds” and “swains” (Figure 128 and Figure 129) were also common miniatures.

¹⁵⁴ See Venuses, page 319.

Figure 128: Plaster of Paris bird, nineteenth century.
<https://uk.pinterest.com/pollyburnell/chalkware/>

Figure 129: A plaster of Paris figurine of a “shepherd boy,” nineteenth century.

<http://tinyurl.com/jumh9k2>

Paul Pry: “I hope I don’t intrude”

Figure 130: Figurine of John Liston as Paul Pry, 1830. Victoria and Albert Museum.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1113659/john-liston-as-paul-pry-figurine-robert-bloor-co/>

Figure 131: John Liston as Paul Pry.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1138689/paul-pry-print-unknown/>

The mention of a *Paul Pry* figurine leads to an important aspect of the song and the miniatures it describes.¹⁵⁵ The comedy *Paul Pry*, by John Poole, was a highly popular production at London's Haymarket Theatre in 1825, and a large number of figurines were immediately produced that depicted the actor John Liston playing the role (Figure 130 and Figure 131), that he debuted. A nosey-parker and peeping tom, the phrase he repeats in the play whenever he is discovered, "I hope I don't intrude", could be said, in today's parlance, to have "gone viral". The publisher's blurb for the forthcoming book *I Hope I Don't Intrude* (David Vincent 2015) states:

After 1825 the overly inquisitive figure of Paul Pry appeared everywhere - in songs, stories, and newspapers, and on everything from buttons and Staffordshire pottery to pubs, ships, and stagecoaches - and 'Paul-Prying' rapidly entered the language

(Publisher's web site)

Madame Vestris, an actress perhaps most renowned for her legs, which she often revealed in roles that demanded male costumes (Figure 132 and Figure 143), also appeared in the first performances, and performed a duet with Liston (Figure 137).

¹⁵⁵ See also p 163.

Figure 132: Madame Vestris

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1138863/madame-vestris-as-don-felix-print-dolby-thomas/>

Deeper excavation

The cover and lyrics help us to date the piece and learn more about its context.

Madame Vestris lived from 1797 to 1856. She first appeared in Italian Opera in 1815, but by 1831 had begun presenting burlesques and extravaganza, so probably she would have sung this piece well before the mid century. Clara Fisher (1811-1898) an actress and singer, moved from Britain to the US in 1827 – she performed for the last time in Liverpool on July 13th 1827. An infant prodigy and versatile actress (she took all six female roles in *An Actress of All Work* at the Theatre Royal in 1825) she

was a sensational success in the US, but appeared less frequently after her marriage in 1834.

E. S Mesier and George Melksham Bourne both printed lithographs and published in New York in the late 1820s and 1830s. Given the careers of the two singers listed on the sheet music it is likely that the piece was published between 1826 and 1830.

This is borne out by the V&A dating of its figurines of *Paul Pry* and *Broom Girl* (see below). Many US-published works at the time were pirated from European copyrighted publications. The image seller on the cover of *Buy Image* certainly has a somewhat raffish European air about him. *Paul Pry* premiered in New York in 1826, so “*Buy Image!*” may have been attempt to ride on the popularity of the show in that city. It is remarkable that the event of a popular stage show could so rapidly not only travel around the world as news, but also create enough interest to make it worthwhile to compose songs and print sheet music and make figurines of the stars that would also attract international interest.

The image-seller’s stock-in-trade



Figure 133: Enlarged detail of the image seller’s tray.

In his right hand, the vendor is brandishing an apparently female figure (Figure 134). This figure represents *The Broom Girl*, the singer of a ballad first performed by Madame Vestris at the Haymarket Theatre in 1826 (Figure 135). The figurine would originally have held two brooms made from twigs (Figure 136). Madame Vestris also performed a comedy duet of the same song with John Liston, who dressed in drag (Figure 137) so the figurine may have represented him.



Figure 134: Enlarged detail of the figurine in the seller's right hand.

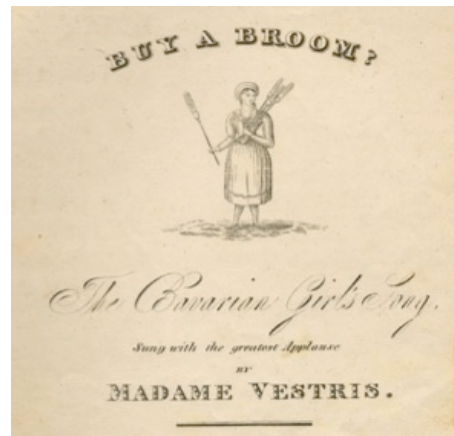


Figure 135: Sheet music of *Buy a Broom?* Sung by Madame Vestris. The Lester S. Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University

Figure 136: Madame Vestris as the Broom Girl, 1827-30. The brooms, which were wooden twigs, are missing.

<http://webapps.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explorer/index.php?oid=37688> Fitzwilliam Museum.

Figure 137: Madame Vestris and Mr. Liston in their *Duet Buy a Broom*, 1826. Lithograph, Victoria and Albert Museum.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1137809/h-beard-print-collection-print-lynch-j-h/>

Despite the seller being drawn as oddly out of scale when compared with the street he is standing in, the poor quality of the engraving presents a challenge in identifying his stock. He is resting his tray of figurines on what seems to be a bollard (see below p 412). A female bust with a bow in her hair faces us. Next is a figure that is almost certainly *Paul Pry* with a bust (of Wellington? or Napoleon?) to its left. Another slightly different figurine of *Paul Pry* stands next to the bust. Behind the seller's left arm is yet another figure of *Paul Pry*, and a second *Broom Girl* figure stands on the far corner. The other figures are unidentifiable.

Fair ladies

The *Buy Image* ballad illuminates several strands of nineteenth-century everyday life. Firstly it tells us that images were familiar, and interesting, enough to inspire a balladeer with the confidence that his creation would be listened to and enjoyed by theatre audiences. It informs us that women in the early 1800s formed an important part of those audiences – it would be pointless addressing a song to “fair ladies” if they weren't sitting in the stalls. The versions of the ballad were sung by performers of both genders, and at least one of those performers, Madame Vestris, was well-known enough to have a place in theatre history.

Buy Image! The London Version

There were probably several more editions of this ballad. In his book *Staffordshire Portrait Figures*, Gordon Pugh published an illustration of *Buy Image!* (Figure 138) that had been published in London (Pugh 1988, 20).

The design is almost exactly the same as the New York version. The quality of the lithograph is better, which suggests that this is the original, and the American is a copy. However the illustration of the image seller is reversed, which might not be an issue except that in this version the figurine of *Buy a Broom* is also reversed, and therefore she is depicted as holding her brooms in the incorrect hands. The shop front in the background bears the name "W. Rose, Publisher", so one would expect this to be the publisher of this version, yet the publisher is listed on the cover as being Golding and D'Almaine. It seems therefore that "W. Rose" reversed another unknown publisher's original, which was subsequently copied by Golding and D'Almaine. Pugh unfortunately did not record the source of this illustration.

Figure 138: *Buy Image!* published in London. (Pugh 1988, 20)

Hudson's *Buy My Images*

Figure 139: Cover of *Buy My Images* c 1842 (Victoria and Albert Museum). The image-seller is holding a bust of Wellington in his right hand.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1281776/buy-my-images-sheet-music-hudson-thomas-mr/>

There were several other songs celebrating or at least making use of the image seller. Hudson's *Buy My Images* was published in about 1842 (Pugh 1988, 11). Like *Buy Image*, the cover of the sheet music carries an illustration of an image-seller (Figure 139).

Unlike *Buy Image!* the lyrics of *Buy My Images* mimic an Italian accent, or at least an imagined Italian accent:

*Will you buy Images? I Images cry,
 Very fine very pretty, very cheap will you buy?
 Poor Italiano him never in de glooms
 All sort Images beautiful your rooms.
 First one Prima LORD BYRON head,
 BYRON live longtimes after him dead
 Loves tales Poeta-all very true one,
 Every body's knows him call DON JUAN,
 Will you buy Images? I Images cry
 Very fine very pretty-cheap-will you buy?
 Poor Italiano better laugh as cry,
 Will you buy Images? very cheap, will you buy?¹⁵⁶*

We can date the song by the last verse, in which Victoria is praised for having “two Royal babies:

*Now Finitissimo nex' one seen
 Dis FAIR VICTORIA Old England Queen*

¹⁵⁶ For full lyrics see Appendix II, p 183.

Got two Royal Babies ready for store
 Every years mean haves one little more
 Best Lady for Queen ever could known
 Reign Peoples heart and grace Inglese Throne
 Buy dis Images be Lealta seen
 You not want Sovereign God save de Queen.

Buy my Images

The lyrics of a second, anonymous, version state that Queen Victoria now has six children, which dates its publication to between 1848 and 1850.



Figure 140: Buy My Images (1848-50). British Library.



Figure 141: Version of Buy My Images, sung by T.C. Reeves and printed in Leeds (1850-53) (English Folk Song and Dance Society).

Though the lyrics are music-hall doggerel, they still tell us something of the image sellers, whose poor English is parodied. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the song is that it expects its audience to recognise and appreciate a list of literary greats – Byron, Shakespeare, Scott, Burns and Milton, as well as the usual Nelson, Wellington, Albert and Victoria. These characters also feature on the image-seller's tray (Figure 142), helpfully labelled. One wonders how many of these names would mean anything to a modern audience. The list also confirms the impression that these individuals would have graced the mantelpieces of ordinary people, for it was those who were in the music- and concert-hall stalls who bought the images. It is worth noting a few wry touches, such as Prince Albert being paid £30,000 a year just to ride with Victoria, though given that by the time of Reeves' version the Queen had given birth to seven children there may have been a sexual undertone to this line.

I have not been able to locate the music for this song.

Figure 142: *Buy My Images*, 1842. Busts on the image seller's tray: left-right Scott, Victoria, Shakespeare, Albert, Byron.

By the time a third version of this “celebrated comic song, as sung by T. C. Reeves at most of the principal London and provincial concerts” was printed in Leeds (Figure 141) the Queen had had a seventh child, so dates from 1850-1853. This broadside, the words of which differ slightly from Hudson’s ballad, states that the music is available from “Duncombe” (John Duncombe) of Middle Row, Holborn. In another demonstration of the links that spread from the Holborn mantelpiece, Duncombe is connected to Madame Vestris (see above), having published a reputedly scurrilous account of her love life in *The Adventures and Amours of Madame Vestris* (Kirkpatrick 2014). She sued him, unsuccessfully, in 1826, to prevent publication of the third part of this tale. Surviving illustrations (for example Figure 143) from the publication not only hint at its contents, but also show why her legs were so notorious! So admired were these limbs that the enterprising James Papera made and sold plaster casts of them. (Jacob 2011). This caused much amusement, and inspired a Henry Heath caricature (*see page 410 and Figure 197*).

Madame Vestris’ legs, in plaster form, caused mirth on the other side of the Channel, where *La Revue de Paris* of 1832, noted jocularly that English champions of the arts had accused the French of barbarism and demanded reprisals for selling a leg for only 3 francs 75 cents while in England a leg had achieved three shillings (Véron 1832, 50).

James Papera’s somewhat bumpy career, certainly in those early stages recorded, oddly enough, in 1843 on the pages of *The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, shines some light on the erratic lives of itinerant image sellers. Phrenologist Richard Beamish describes Papera living a life “subject to hardships of no common kind; having no change of clothes or of linen; sleeping on the ground in the open air; often destitute of food, or driven to the necessity of satisfying hunger by eating of the

wild-fruits which the country chanced to afford” (Beamish 1843, 155). But later, Papera, restless despite having recruited ten boys from Italy and creating a well-regarded business in London, decided to combine selling figures with acting, creating a troupe that toured Scotland and the North of England, and then South America, making money from selling “waxen images of saints” (Beamish 1843, 157).

Figure 143: Madame Vestris, from *The Adventures and Amours of Madame Vestris*.

http://john-adcock.blogspot.co.uk/2014_06_01_archive.html

Come buy my pretty images

Another song, *Come buy my pretty images*, attributed to J.W. Fielder was published in 1856 (see www.ralphmills.com/PhD.html for audio file). The lyrics (see Appendix II, p 201) refer to a long list of celebrities, including Victoria, Albert, Omar Pasha, Lord Raglan, Admiral Graham, Charles Napier, General Windham, Field Marshal Campbell, Admiral Lyons, Earl of Cardigan, Earl of Lucan, Florence Nightingale and the Earl of Clarendon. They are written in an imitation of an Italian accent:

Come buy dese pretty Images, Vot to you now I show,

De old ones I have sell dem all, And dese are new you know,

*Dese Images so vary sheep, to sell I now vill try,
Vary fine, vary sheep, vary pretty vill you buy,
Vill you but my pretty Images, dese Image vill you buy,
Vary fine, vary sheep, Vill you buy vill you buy,
Of a poor Italian, Vat'd sooner laugh as cry,
Come buy my pretty Images dese Image vill you buy.*



Figure 144: *Come buy my pretty images*, 1856. J.W. Fielder.

The ballad celebrates the Crimean War, and a number of political and military celebrities.



Figure 145: *Come Buy My Pretty Images*. Detail of the image-seller's tray. (left-right) Florence Nightingale, Omar Pasha? Queen Victoria, General Windham?, Charles Napier?, Prince Albert, Admiral Lyons, Field Marshall Campbell?

Celebrities and cupids

The characters/figures mentioned in these songs are a fascinating mixture of “classical” (Cupid and Venus), intellectual (Shakespeare, Milton, Walter Scott and Robert Burns), Patriotic (Victoria and Albert), celebrity (Paul Pry, Wellington, Nelson) sentimental (little boys, swains) and faunal (birds). This mixture obviously meant something to the audiences; there would be no point in including unknown figures in the lyrics. And, importantly, it would not have included figures beyond the *class-knowledge*, to coin an ungainly phrase, of the listeners. By “class-knowledge” I mean a general, widespread knowledge amongst the working classes of, say, people from history or writers. It could be argued that theatre audiences weren't the poorest of the poor, but it is also unlikely that those who queued to see and hear Madame

Vestris in London and New York, who laughed at the mock-Italian accents, who recognised Paul Pry or who bought the ballads were all middle class. And in an era when to own a piano was a sign of achievement (Parakilas 2002, 226) the ballads, with their easy accompaniments, would probably have featured in DIY entertainment. There was also a vein of racism in the ballads, especially that by Hudson, who makes fun of the itinerants' misuse of English. This almost certainly reflected life in the streets, and contrasted with the more colourful vision of the image seller as communicated by the romanticising artists and writers of the time.

Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes: a voice from the past

The enigmatic French *chanteuse*, Berthe Sylva (Berthe Faquet, 1885-1941), had three-decade long career in the early twentieth century. She was idolised at the time, having a raw voice that suited the emerging technologies of recording, and which seemed suffused with the sorrows and pain of someone who had started her working life as a chambermaid, had a child at 16 who she saw again only three times in her life, and though a successful artiste, died of drink and poverty.

Sylva, about whom we know very little apart from her recordings and a handful of photographs, often performed narrative songs – “*chansons vécues*” – about the hardships facing the poor, so *Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes – The Little Statuette Seller* – fits well within her repertoire.¹⁵⁷ It is likely that Sylva would have come across and heard image-sellers in the Paris of her early life. The song was composed

¹⁵⁷ Lyrics by Luccia Folver, music by H. Roberty and Cloerec-Maupas.

in 1909, so by the time she recorded it in 1933 little image-boys may have been just a memory, but her rendition of the spoken words “Jolies statuettes, Signor? Jolies statuettes, Signora? Santa Belli!” in her YouTube recording (Sylva, 2015) is perhaps the nearest we can get to actually hearing one of the street cries of nineteenth and early twentieth century France. “Santa Belli” should perhaps have been more accurately rendered as “Santi Belli”.

The lyrics milk the sentimental image of a little seven-year-old orphan peddler, with large blue eyes, long curly hair “like that of an angel” and his cruel treatment by his master, who spends his takings on carousing:

Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes

C’était un tout petit enfant,

Venant de Rome;

Il avait à peine sept ans,

Pauvre petit bonhomme!

Sans père ni mère, seul dans la vie,

Venant de la ville jolie,

Il avait de grands yeux très bleus,

Des yeux étranges,

De longs cheveux bouclés, comme ceux d’un ange

D’un ange blond de cieux!

[Parle]

Jolies statuettes, Monsieur?

Jolies statuettes, Madame?

*Santa Belli!*¹⁵⁸

Figure 146: The Score and Lyrics of *Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes ou Santa-Belli* 1909 (Bibliothèque Nationale).

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k385115f>

The boy, who dreams of Italy and of having a beautiful mother, one day meets and befriends a stray dog in an alley and they become inseparable. Finally the brutish master ejects the terrified boy on a snowy night. The pair die of cold, huddled together in a doorway.

¹⁵⁸ See Appendix II, p 282.

10: The archaeology of the Plumtree Court mantelpiece IV

Analysing the assemblage

An individual's desire for such decorative (and wholly useless from a utilitarian point of view) items like a figurine may be seen as part of a process by which the modern bourgeois sensibility is constructed in the urban working class

(Schwarzbach 2001, 42)

Absences: the material conundrum

In my MA dissertation (Mills 2010) and a subsequent book chapter (Mills 2015) I introduced and stressed the importance of miniature objects to historical archaeology. I listed miniature objects that had been discovered during archaeological excavations and investigations around the world. I subsequently discovered during this project that there was a further important class of miniature object – the plaster of Paris figure – that was at the time as numerous, if not more so, than the ceramic and metallic objects I had previously noted, and was more frequently referred to by contemporary writers and illustrators. Made in millions, sold cheaply, and present in working-class domestic contexts throughout the industrialised world, the subjects of plaster of Paris miniatures reflected current

thinking and attitudes. Despite this, because of their fragility, and because they decomposed in archaeological deposits, plaster of Paris miniatures are very rarely referred to in studies of nineteenth century material culture. Their absence from archaeological reports, from museums, from discussions of “Victorian life” and from reconstructions of “Victorian parlours” has resulted in their absence from the histories of the period.¹⁵⁹

Examining these absent objects and their entanglements nevertheless enables me to draw parallels with those more robust, tangible, well-known and often-curated objects manufactured in earthenware or porcelain. Though they were a significant product of many potteries in Britain and beyond during the nineteenth century, they were rarely specifically written about or illustrated. Many were probably described as and included under the general headings of “chimney ornaments,” “images” and “china,” and so are included in my survey (especially in reported crime, where they were occasionally mentioned both as stolen goods and as weapons, the mantelpiece presumably offering a convenient arsenal of material that could be thrown or wielded). Even so, I have been able to find only one or two nineteenth-century references to peddlers of ceramic figurines, and only a single illustration of an “Earthenware Man” (Figure 147) to match the 150-odd plaster equivalents. This is strange, because John Thomas Smith, who drew the earthenware man and, earlier, an image-seller wrote in 1839: “of all the tradesmen who supply the domestic table, there are none more frequently called upon than the earthenware man...the

¹⁵⁹ “Chalkware” figures are displayed in some North American museums, but in the main are either described as examples of “folk” art or are misattributed to Pennsylvania (Anon 2008b).

itinerant Staffordshire Ware vendor, exhibited in the following plate, is sure to sell something in every street he enters” (Smith 1839, 61).¹⁶⁰



Figure 147: *Staffordshire Ware* (1839) John Thomas Smith.

Hindley, in his *History of the Cries of London*, includes, beneath a woodcut of an image-seller (Figure 148), the verse:

Buy my images, Images

Come buy my images – earthenware

Your mantelpiece to bedeck

Examine them with greatest care

You will not find a single speck

(Hindley 1881, 138)

¹⁶⁰ See Appendix II, Figure A1.15, p 20.



Figure 148: *Buy images! Good and cheap! Images, very good—very cheap!* Undated but probably pre 1810. Thomas Bewick. (Hindley 1881, 287).

Hindley’s work is a mish-mash of earlier woodcuts and extracts from earlier writing, many of them undated. It is therefore difficult to place this verse and the two woodcuts he includes in this and a later edition.¹⁶¹ The Bewick woodcuts are probably late eighteenth century or early nineteenth, and the verse may also have been collected many years before Hindley’s book. Both woodcuts show image-sellers with trays of figures balanced on their heads.

That commentator on everyone and everything in London, Henry Mayhew, writes of a “swag shop” that was selling: “a great store of shepherdesses.” He notices that so popular was the Bard that he “did not see one of these windows without its

¹⁶¹ See Appendix I, p 112.

Shakspeare, a sitting figure.”(Mayhew 1851, 333-4). Mayhew distinguishes between “figures” that appear to be identifiable characters such as Shakespeare, and “pots” that are generalised, unnamed and poorly sculpted figurines. It is also interesting that he writes that the latter at least come from Germany rather than British potteries.¹⁶² Mayhew complicates matters a little further on by referring to “pot figures” whose quality isn’t an improvement. These are caricatures “...of Louis Philippe, carrying a very red umbrella, Marshall Haynau, with some instrument of torture in his hand, while over all boomed a huge English seaman, in yellow waistcoat and with a brick coloured face” (Mayhew 1851, 334).¹⁶³ A recently-deceased monarch who had been forced to abdicate, and an Austrian general infamous for his brutality seem odd originals for figurines.

Apparently-ceramic figures appear in some paintings, for example Collinson’s *Answering the Emigrant’s Letter* (Figure 149), while their plaster equivalents are not obvious. This may have been the result of a preference amongst artists for the type of home that displayed ceramic ornaments. The lack of plaster of Paris figures may result from the artists not venturing into homes where these were present, or simply creating imagined scenarios using material with which they were familiar. There may not have been much of a market for realistic scenes of working-class life other than depictions of sensational poverty or sentimental/humorous scenes. The snippets of information from *Punch* cartoons or newspaper fillers are ironically more accurate.

¹⁶² I have yet to find any other examples of low-quality German wares.

¹⁶³ King Louis-Philippe (1773-1850) of France always carried an umbrella except when wearing ceremonial dress. General Julius Jacob von Haynau (1786-1853) was an Austrian who put down insurrections in Italy and Hungary.



Figure 149: Ceramic miniatures on mantelpiece in Collinson's *Answering the Emigrant's Letter* (detail). (Manchester Art Gallery).

<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/collection/?id=1966.179>

Figure 150: Surviving example (subject unknown) of miniature visible in Collinson's painting. (zeppy.io).

<http://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Antique-Victorian-Staffordshire-Pottery-Couple-Figurine-/231673139609?hash=item35f0cb9199:g:g9AAAOSwLVZV5dD2>

More confusion might be added by plaster of Paris image makers' habit of making moulds of ceramic originals. Many plaster "images" were also painted, bronzed or gilded, which makes the identification of their composition difficult, if not

impossible, in paintings and photographs. Towards the end of the nineteenth century some Staffordshire ceramics were undecorated, and at a distance it is difficult to tell Parian ware and marble from plaster of Paris, although these were significantly more expensive and unlikely to appear in working-class contexts.

Some writers refer to plaster casts as “clay.” For example “Signor J Pelechi’s hair flicked his velveteen shoulders as with head aback he derided the public lack of art appreciation reflected by his arrest for hawking clay statuettes without license” (*San Francisco Call*, December 22nd 1904). We soon learn that these are in fact plaster of Paris: “Signor Palechi’s endeavour to elevate the art standard of this materialistic city consisted of his manufacture at home and offering for sale abroad miniature plaster images of personages famed universally or locally. His collection of molds enabled him to turn out exact counterfeits of Napoleon Bonaparte, Mrs Carrie Nation, Garibaldi, Young Corbett, William J Bryan, Aguinaldo and May Irwin. He was preparing casts of ‘Battling’ Nelson and Mrs Chadwick.”¹⁶⁴

There is a hint that plaster of Paris images may have replaced their ceramic equivalents as the century progressed: “Ho, for the country farm-house, as it was twenty years ago...the quaint bits of China on the mantel have made room for far more commonplace plaster images” (*Daily National Era*, March 30th 1854, Washington D.C.).

¹⁶⁴ See Appendix II, p 279. Carrie Nation (1846-1911) was a temperance activist who wielded an axe on several taverns in Kansas; “Young Corbett” was probably James “Gentleman Jim” Corbett (1866-1933), a heavyweight boxer; William J. Bryan (1860-1925) was a leading Democratic politician; Emilio Aguinaldo (1869-1964) was the first President of the Philippines, having led the country to independence from Spain in 1898; May Irwin (1862-1938) was a vaudeville actress and singer; “Battling Nelson” was the nickname of Oscar Nielsen (1882-1954), Danish boxer and world lightweight champion; Using the name Cassie Chadwick, Elizabeth Bigley (1857-1907) passed herself off as Andrew Carnegie’s illegitimate daughter and defrauded several banks.

Whilst the overall picture is unclear and contradictory, it seems that the trade in ceramic figures, and those who sold them, failed to engage the imagination of most nineteenth century writers and lyricists (the words of the ballads included in this study could admittedly apply to ceramic objects, but the cover illustrations appear to favour street sellers). Perhaps this was because they were not sold by such colourful and romantic individuals as Italian image-sellers: the “sunburned sons of Italy” who sold plaster of Paris images from trays balanced on their heads were of far more interest to poets and artists. It may be because ceramics were sold in shops rather than on the streets (which involved attracting customers using characteristic cries), or because their subject matter was narrower or more mundane, or because they less accurately represented classical originals.

Figure 151: Detail of *Children Playing at Doctors*, 1863. Frederick Daniel Hardy (V&A). This lower middle-class mantelpiece displays several objects that might be ceramics.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O17368/children-playing-at-doctors-oil-painting-hardy-frederick-daniel/>

Figure 152: Detail of *The Card Players*, 1891. Charles Hunt.

<http://artpaintingartist.org/the-card-players-by-charles-hunt/>



Figure 153: Detail of *He's Worth Framing* c1943. Charles Spencelayh.

<http://www.art.com/products/p21297168786-sa-i7363003/charles-spencelayh-he-s-worth-framing-c-1943.htm>

This also begs the question: was there a difference in end-customer preference? It is perhaps significant that paintings that include ceramic Staffordshire-like objects range over contexts from gentile poverty to middle-class gentility. Artists include the pre-Raphaelite (for a short time) Collinson, the painter of romantic/sentimental subjects Frederick Daniel Hardy (Figure 151), Charles Hunt (Figure 152) and the early twentieth-century painter Charles Spencelayh, who created nostalgia-steeped works

that often featured elderly men apparently deep in their memories of times past (Figure 153).

Whatever this murky picture might obscure, I contend that on the whole what is revealed by my study of plaster of Paris objects can apply to their ceramic equivalents. Both included representations of celebrities of all kinds. Both included animals, fruits and flowers. There were differences – plaster of Paris images rarely if at all included “bocage”, that stylised vegetation that forms a background to many Staffordshire figures. Staffordshire figures were also rarely accurate renderings in miniature of famous originals.

Figure 154: Staffordshire *Venus*.

<http://www.mystaffordshirefigures.com/blog/venus>

Figure 155: Plaster of Paris *Venus*.

<https://www.chairish.com/product/319887/nude-venus-chalkware-sculpture>

For example, a Staffordshire “Venus” (Figure 154) was very different to a plaster of Paris Venus de Milo (Figure 155). There is a paradox here. Plaster images ranged from crude and bizarrely-coloured animals to very recognisable statuettes that were “copies.” Ceramics were often reproductions of crudely or imaginatively sculpted originals. Ironically, the bust of Milton, a cat or two and a Clytie that graced the mantelpiece of an impoverished householder might have more accurately resembled their originals than those on the mantelpiece of someone slightly better off who could afford Staffordshire “chany.” Cottages and castles are common pottery objects. Plaster of Paris is ill-suited for objects that are regularly handled, such as spill holders, which often represented rural scenes or buildings. I wonder if references to “clay” images might simply have been a misunderstanding.

Figure 156: *The Artist in her Painting Room, York, 1837-9. Mary Ellen Best.*

<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/full.php?ID=170748>

Figure 157: *The Artist in her Painting Room, York, 1837-9.* (detail) Mary Ellen Best.

A clue to the solution of this conundrum is provided by Mary Ellen Best, a middle-class woman from York, who painted scenes from her life in the 1830s, at least until she was married and had children. Her home, as portrayed in the 1837-9 painting *The Artist in her Painting Room* (Figure 156) and other related works, is a colourful middle-class environment, in which, on the mantelpiece, we can make out several figures (Figure 157).

The previous year, Best had painted *The Interior of a China Shop*, a rare glimpse of 1830s retail (Figure 158). The shop's shelves are crammed with blue and white and other ceramics. In the background are a number of busts and figures, all of which appear to be bronzed. This was a very different shopping experience to that which was going on in the streets outside.

Figure 158: *The Interior of a China Shop*, c 1836. Mary Ellen Best. Note a prominent Venus de Medici (top right). (Private collection).

<https://www.1st-art-gallery.com/Mary-Ellen-Best/The-Interior-Of-A-China-Shop.html>

I suggest that ceramic miniatures were more likely to be found as elements of middle-class bric-à-brac than in working-class assemblages, at least in comparison with plaster images. The choice of plaster of Paris as a construction material meant that although millions of these objects were made, at temporary and permanent locations all over the industrialising world, their fragility has meant that they have mostly not survived, and as a result of this, *our* consciousness/awareness of those who made, sold and bought them became very limited. Without the tangible evidence in archaeological finds trays or museum display cases, we “forgot” them.

Many ceramic miniatures have survived. They were made in equivalent numbers, though because they demanded a more complex technology – pottery kilns—they were manufactured in fewer, more permanent, locations. Because we can see and touch these objects we feel we know more about those who owned them. They

feature in museum reconstructions, on present-day mantelpieces and in antique shops. Paradoxically we know little about who made them, and there were very few mentions of *ceramic* “images” in contemporary media. Ceramic images (or “chimney ornaments”) also often featured in reports of theft, which also suggests that they were to be found in a better class of home. There are some accounts of image-sellers dealing in ceramic ornaments, though these they would have presumably been obtained from wholesalers.

We are left with an amount of contemporary information about a class of miniature that has not generally survived, and little information about a class of object that has survived in significant numbers. My contention is that nineteenth century mantelpieces would have displayed numerous plaster of Paris objects.

The usefulness of “useless things”

In his detailed examination of the materiality of his parents’ “living room” the social scientist, Steven Riggins, created a list of analytical categories (Riggins 1994, 111). He begins by dismissing “agency,” which he defines as “[distinguishing] between the active and passive use of objects...between objects to be handled and objects to be contemplated,” as being too inflexible in domestic situations, where an object might be at different times both on display and then handled. Instead he suggests that “mode” provides a more subtle differentiation because a single object can possess both “active” and “passive” modes. This is difficult argument to sustain: the decorative objects on the Plumtree Court mantelpiece are “passive,” but possess the

agency to delight, amuse, impress (as they did George Godwin) and reinforce identity.

In the following chapter I do, however, make use of Riggins' categories as a convenient scaffold around which to construct an initial analysis of the functions of the objects on the Plumtree mantelpiece. Each category is first introduced in theory and then is applied to objects in this research. Riggins' categories that I have utilised are:

- A. Normal and alien use
- B. Status objects
- C. Esteem objects
- D. Collective objects
- E. Stigma objects
- F. Disidentifying objects
- G. Social facilitators
- H. Indigenous objects/exotic objects
- I. Time indicators
- J. Size and proportions
- K. Method of production
- L. Display syntax
- M. Flavour

A. Normal and alien use

The objects on the mantelpiece would normally remain passively on display, arranged so as to be seen and to communicate their various messages. They are displayed in a standard, unremarkable fashion. There is no evidence that any of them are being used in ways that are alien to their intrinsic function as decorative objects. Occasionally mantelpiece decorations *were* used in unusual ways, such as in 1909 Omaha when Mrs Janosky used a plaster image of a dog as a weapon with

which to attack her son-in-law during a quarrel.¹⁶⁵ Using the base or the hollow interior of an image to hide small objects such as money or stolen items was another alien through common use.¹⁶⁶ Mantelpiece objects were frequently used to obtain credit, for example by pawning them (Stallybrass 1998, 196). Some mantelpiece ornaments were used to support watches (pocket watches) and other small valuable objects such as necklaces. Another use that could be termed “alien” is the association with superstition, which is further discussed below (*see p 401*).

B. Status objects

An ostentatious display of expensive or high-value objects as a way of expressing status would have been very rare in often-shared nineteenth-century working-class homes where security was poor or non-existent.¹⁶⁷ However the mere presence of numbers of decorative objects on this mantelpiece, and their variety, may have been regarded as a measure of status, in that although individually they were inexpensive, an imposing array in the midst of Plumtree Court’s squalor would indicate that the householder had more than average amount of disposable income, taste or education. This is certainly how Robert Robert’s father regarded his knick-knacks (Roberts 1971/1990, 18-19), proudly displayed in a Salford “slum.” Given Godwin’s horrified description of the living conditions in Plumtree Court, the “barbarities” on the mantelpiece he uses as an illustration may indeed have demonstrated that their owner regarded their status as higher than the general population squeezed into the homes.

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix II, p 281.

¹⁶⁶ See Appendix III, p 294.

¹⁶⁷ Chimney ornaments were nevertheless often stolen – see Appendix III.

C. Esteem objects

Some mantelpiece objects, such as trophies and prizes, demonstrate that the owner holds themselves in high esteem and wants to reflect this to themselves and to share this with anyone else visiting the home. There are no obvious esteem objects on the Plumtree mantelpiece. Other miniatures may have been used to indicate pride in achievement, as Mrs Briggs demonstrated in 1889 when she explained that a highly-coloured image in a corner represented the “fruits” of her husband’s labours.¹⁶⁸

D. Collective objects

This is an important category to be considered when looking at miniatures. These objects appear often to have acted as “badges” indicating a social attitude (e.g. Napoleon = republicanism/revolution) or adherence to a social movement or religion (e.g. Washington, Wesley). Someone viewing such objects could recognise a kindred spirit or a likely social miss-match. The objects can also indicate membership of an often undefined social group, community or “type.” This could be deliberate or unconscious. An example of conscious self-identification is the possession of figurines of “popular” criminals such as Dick Turpin or a political figure such as Napoleon. The former might suggest that the owner feels themselves to be rebellious or anti-establishment, or dislikes the wealthy. These attitudes would have been either good-humoured (“I’m a bit of a lad”) or more serious (“Don’t cross me”). Displaying figures of royalty, aristocrats, military heroes, would indicate support for the establishment. The busts of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra on a shelf in a

¹⁶⁸ See Appendix II, p 251.

New York tenement probably tell us of a continuing connection with a mother country and its values. Napoleon, a hugely popular figurine (*see further discussion below page 328*) had different meanings depending on a number of factors, some geographical. In France the presence of the figurine would have indicated loyalty to the regime or the individual, or nostalgia or of identification with his ideals. For veterans it would show pride in their part in his campaigns. In other countries Napoleon served as an indication of anti-establishment views, of republicanism and of working-class collective identity (his reputation, whether deserved or not in the view of history, was of a leader who championed the “peasant”).

Godwin suggests that the objects on the Plumtree mantelpiece demonstrate a collective “love of art.” He also suggests that “striving upwards” is occurring. Godwin tells us that he believes that there is a general improvement in working-class taste, something earlier indicated by William Hone.¹⁶⁹ The religious objects (crucifix, holy water, rosary beads, religious tracts) reveal a wish to declare and reinforce identity within a particular faith (Catholic Christianity). The crucifix, a representation in miniature of a original with considerable meaning, could be regarded as falling within the scope of my research, and fits with the religious objects peddled by Italian and other street sellers. A demonstration of faith can be regarded as a shared, collective activity.

¹⁶⁹ See Appendix II, p 176.

E. Stigma objects

Stigma objects convey something negative about the owner. This can be age (if this is defined as a negative) or infirmity or indeed, poverty and class (by those to whom these would be regarded as negatives, see below). There are no intrinsically stigma objects on the Plumtree mantelpiece. As examples of bric-à-brac they would nevertheless be looked at askance by many observers at the time. Godwin of course calls them “barbarities”. William Hone and others pour scorn on spotted cats and parrots.¹⁷⁰ To these and other commentators there was a degree of stigma attached to the mere possession of bric-à-brac (*see p 379*), and they would probably have immediately identified the assemblage as belonging to working-class people, or people with poor taste.

F. Disidentifying objects

These are objects that don’t “fit” or that disguise, accidentally or deliberately, the owner’s status, taste or origin. The objects on the Plumtree Court conform to an interestingly narrow but bifurcated set of “likes”: cats and parrots in one group, bowls of fruit and urns in the other. The two categories do not seem to be closely related. It is easier to imagine collections of animals and collections of bowls/urns as indicating separate enthusiasms. This dichotomy might indicate two influences on the mantelpiece.

Other mantelpieces may very well have been the stage for performances of misrepresentation. It would be easy to purchase figures of literary or other notables

¹⁷⁰ See Appendix II, p 176.

even though the owner was not connected to them intellectually. *Venuses* and *Greek Slaves* may have been bought because of their artistry, their beauty, their associations with the ancient world, or their subtle or not-so-subtle eroticism, while at the same time dissuading any eyebrow raising by explaining that that they were “classical” or “artistic.” Horace Smith, tongue in cheek, warns us that if we were to purchase a figure of Voltaire we must declare that it is because it is a “work of art,” not because we participate in his “sentiments” or admire his writings (Smith 1830, 22).

G. Social facilitators.

Riggins uses this term to describe objects such as games that encourage competition or collaboration. None are present on the Plumtree mantelpiece.

H. Indigenous objects/exotic objects

A nineteenth century mantelpiece could include exotic objects brought back by travellers as well as locally made and purchased figurines. A Staffordshire dog would similarly have been exotic when placed in a Scandinavian window (see below, p 339). When *figurinae* carried their wares from Italy in the early days of their activities the objects could have been regarded as exotic. By the end of the nineteenth century mantelpiece figurines tended to adhere to an homogeneity of styles. The objects on the Plumtree Court mantelpiece appear to have been purchased locally. They indicate a delight in the mildly exotic, limited to a parrot, bowls of fruit and an urn. If the two mystery figures were corn dollies they might represent an exotic link with paganism/superstition.

I. Time indicators

Temporal homogeneity: many of these objects are examples of figures that were manufactured over a long time period and some of them are still available today, so they are poor indicators of time. If it hadn't been for Godwin telling us when he visited Plumtree Court we wouldn't be able to accurately date the illustration unless it had been possible to learn more about the two religious documents attached to wall. On the other hand, many miniatures of celebrities were produced only while their notoriety ran high, so their appearance on a mantelpiece would reflect the time of their fame, or at least the beginning of it. Some individuals, for example Napoleon and Madame Vestris, remained popular long after they were at their most active.

Temporal heterogeneity: All the objects on the mantelpiece fit the 1850s date well; none are distinctively older or newer than the others.

J. Size and proportions

Miniaturisation: Assuming the mantelpiece to be about 10cm deep, eight objects can be classified as "miniatures." There is no constant scale.

Monumentality: this working-class mantelpiece was not a site of monumentality.

K. Method of production:

Mass-produced: The plaster of Paris figurines on the mantelpiece would have been made in large numbers in the workshops of *figurinai*. If any were ceramic, they too would have been mass-produced in potteries.

Hand made: If the two mystery objects were corn dollies, these would have been hand-made. If they were crocheted dolls, they too would have been hand-made.

L. Display syntax:

This category examines the manner in which objects are displayed in relation to each other:

Co-location: the objects share a defined location – the mantelpiece.

Highlighting and understating: their position at the focal point of the room highlights them, although one cat has been placed facing the wall, so could be said to be “understated.” This may have been accidental.

Clustering and dispersing. The objects are clustered, though this may have been because of the limited space on a mantelpiece rather than a intention to arrange them close together. The cluster means that some objects are positioned towards the back of the shelf and are partly obscured by those in the foreground. The corn dollies are placed symmetrically, as are the two small pictures and the religious prints on the wall. The pair of fruit bowls is located to one side. The crucifix is placed centrally. The objects are brought together and clustered as a cast of performers gathers on the stage.

Status consistency and status inconsistency: the objects display consistency of status. No one object stands out from the rest as higher or lower status. They are all classified by Godwin as “barbaric.”

Degree of conformity: The objects conform in various ways. They share similar values, materials and sources. They conform to a narrow set of tastes, though these can be divided into animals/birds and inanimate objects.

M. Flavour:

This is, for me as an archaeologist and writer, the most important of Riggins' list of analytical categories, at least in the current project, and most difficult to both define and to communicate. Riggins tells us that "flavour" is "the general impression conveyed by a room." We have to use the mantelpiece to "invent" a room and then create an impression.

Learning the "flavour" of life in the recent past is another way of making sense of it, of using human senses that include the tool of imagination, one of the most "human" of senses, to place ourselves in the minds of nineteenth century people, to think their thoughts, see with their eyes, to experience their bodily sensations as nearly as we can, given the paucity of clues we have been left. Without the "soft" category of flavour, all the previous categories are merely dull and dusty. Flavour is notoriously difficult to describe, and the use of a class of objects that evoke emotions, reactions – that have "meaning" in other words – is what this research is about. The search for flavour is the goal of archaeology. The rest is merely dust. We revel in imagining life in prehistoric times. We might enjoy thinking about being a Roman so much that we dress in Roman armour and march along Hadrian's Wall. We can experience the "flavour" of the Vikings at the Yorvik Centre in York, complete with authentic smells, or a Civil War battlefield along with authentic armaments, or a "Victorian parlour" replete with a clutter of furniture and bric-à-brac.

Another problem to be faced is that the flavour of a food, of a meal, is a fleeting thing. We savour it and it is gone, a ghost of digestion and memory, something to be looked forward to in the next meal. The flavour of the past is similarly insubstantial – the “flavour” of a few minutes in one room in Plumtree Court evaporates almost as soon as it is conjured up. That is of course true of any examination of history or archaeology. The challenge here is to capture and preserve that flavour in words that are a little more permanent. The objects, three-dimensional, hard to the touch, replete with agency and power and intrinsic meaning, help us to do that. It is ironic that the objects in Godwin’s drawing almost certainly no longer exist, and, assuming that some of them were made of plaster of Paris, they belong to a class of artefact that is almost extinct, and which now survives, apart from a few extant examples, only in words and images.

A final element is that using the term “flavour” risks sounding trivial. It is after all a favourite word in the vocabulary of tourist authorities, lazy journalists and marketers. “Impression,” too, can be shallow, unless the impression is “lasting.”

The room would also have had different flavours depending on who the “taster” was. A working-class neighbour or friend might have been impressed by the number and types of the objects on the mantelpiece. They would have thought that their owner had good taste, or noted that at some time they would have had some cash to spare on knick-knacks. Someone light-fingered would have sized up the array of objects and calculated what they would be worth at the pawn-broker’s. A time traveller from the 21st century, no doubt holding their breath and peering into the

gloom, would notice the peeling wallpaper, the scratches and chips on the ornaments, their garish colours, the astonished murmurs and mutterings from the occupants of the room. A child would covet the cat, a seaman smile nostalgically over the parrot, a fellow Catholic would feel reassurance in the presence of the crucifix, the rosary beads, the holy water, the tracts. The owner of the objects would feel...what? I meet this challenge in Section 13, page 468.

Who, why and how?

People acquired miniatures, usually, it can be assumed, by buying them. Those that were gifted had also been bought by the gift givers. Some were stolen, but again these had originally been purchased. Even those that had been won at fairs had been bought by the stallholders. The nineteenth century was a capitalist one. Miniatures were commodities.

Like F.S. Schwarzbach, when he was looking at a Staffordshire figurine of Jenny Lind, I wanted to ask some questions: “who designed these figures, and why was it that certain subjects were chosen over others (was it the modellers’ decision or the pottery owners’?); who purchased them and why; and how they were incorporated into daily life in the homes in which they were displayed” (Schwarzbach 2001, 45).

Who designed the figures?

(a) Many, if not the majority, of plaster of Paris figures were reduced-scale copies; miniatures of classical or contemporary statues, or copies of existing figures,

including moulds of Staffordshire figurines. The “designs” were therefore either archaeological artefacts (for example the Venus de Medici and the Venus de Milo) or historical (for example Canova’s Shakespeare), or contemporary (for example the two little boys reading and writing (see page 369) or the usually anonymous sculptors of the original Staffordshire figures). There was almost certainly a process of copying copies of copies, which together with the wear and tear on moulds, many of which were plaster of Paris, added to the lack of detail of many of the figures.

(b) Other figures were sculpted by anonymous sculptors and *formatori* back in Italy, on the road or in the temporary or permanent workshops the image-sellers established around the world. These were the cats and other animals, the buildings, the figures of contemporary heroes and heroines, politicians and celebrities that the image-sellers created to meet demands, sometimes local, resulting from fame or infamy, be that short-or long-lived. As some of the newspaper descriptions in Appendix II confirm, these moulds were often bought in from a specialist or imported.¹⁷¹

Why certain designs?

This is a fascinating and complex topic. The image-sellers were capitalists. They had to make a profit to survive, even though their margins were probably larger than might seem at first sight. A US journalist estimated in 1883 that each figurine cost about ten cents to make.¹⁷² It was probably even less. So if the image-seller sold a miniature Shakespeare for 25 cents he was achieving an initial margin of 150 per

¹⁷¹ See p 195.

¹⁷² *Philadelphia Press*, see Appendix II, p 234.

cent. Of course there were other factors that affected that margin, but still, it was enough to keep the trade in images going for nearly 200 years.

The image-sellers told journalists that certain figures always sold well (“pretty ladya” Shakespeare, Milton, Venuses) whereas others were a failure (for example President Cleveland).¹⁷³ They also explained that they would saturate a local market with a range of designs, then either move on or exchange their existing moulds for new ones in order to create a fresh stock of characters. The image-sellers had to be constantly aware of who and what would sell. The range is impressive – see Table 2, page 226.

The objects conform to archaeological expectations in that they possess forms (“cat” “Venus de Milo” etc). They are less useful in providing dating information. They sometimes provide a *terminus post quem* (a figurine of Venus de Milo must date from later than 1821, the year the statue was discovered).

Sales of long-established favourites, the Venuses, Miltons and Shakespeares and the like, depended on the public enthusiasm for these characters. The questions that have to be asked therefore, is why were working-class people buying figurines of ancient Greek gods and goddesses that most of their present-day equivalents would have never heard of? Why Shakespeare and Scott? Why badly-moulded and bizarrely-painted cats and blue apples?

¹⁷³ *St Paul Daily Globe*, see Appendix II, p 251.

Schwarzbach makes a very important point that I haven't come across in any other writing on this subject: that *the makers of figurines were also working class* (Schwarzbach 2001, 47). They lived amongst the people they sold to, and were usually as poor, if not poorer, than many of them. Some of that poverty may have been consciously or unconsciously staged – the public tended to take pity on ragged, starving black-eyed little boys and mournful, humble adults who were prone to burst into tears at the slightest pretext.¹⁷⁴ That the image sellers were regarded as slightly clownish probably helped those near the bottom of the economic scale to feel a little superior to the shambling figures with their trays of fragile objects balanced precariously on their heads. Being working class themselves meant that the image sellers had short lines of communication. They drank in the same taverns, hung around in the streets with the same housewives, mixed with the same savoury and unsavoury individuals, all of whom were potential and actual customers. That they were slightly exotic, slightly “alien,” perhaps helped also. They brought a little of “sunny Italy” to the dull streets of grey London and chilly Baltimore.

Who purchased the miniatures?

The chalk pieces were brighter, sturdier, and both literally and figuratively lacked the polish of the aristocratic Staffordshire porcelains. The animals and people will have a friendlier, less arrogant posing expression, as if adapting themselves to the environment of ordinary folk, where they will grace tables of scrub pine rather than polished mahogany.

(Lipman 1948, 142-3)

¹⁷⁴ See Appendix II, pp 200, 245.

From the evidence I have gathered, decorative plaster of Paris and earthenware objects were bought mostly by working-class people, Jean Lipman's "ordinary folk." For example, *The New York Times* in 1874, reported that: "Their purchasers are, for the most part, among people in humble circumstances who have still something for superfluities."¹⁷⁵ Image-sellers hawked their wares amongst tenements, the busy streets of industrial districts (French 1903, 363) and areas where living conditions were poor, for example Mulberry Bend, New York. The same *NY Times* piece suggests that image-sellers did sometimes venture into the suburbs: "there are vendors who strike for more remunerative trade, who in some way get molds of artistic reductions of antiques, and present really exquisite casts to the educated families of small means who live in the suburbs."¹⁷⁶ Towards the end of the century image-makers took advantage of the development of department stores to retail their products.¹⁷⁷

Like all class divisions, there was a degree of blurring and evolution. In the eighteenth century, before the "industrial revolution" John Flaxman, father of the more well-known sculptor John Flaxman, had a shop in Covent Garden and later on the Strand where he made and sold plaster casts, and where his son learned many of the skills he was to later utilise in his career. Flaxman senior's stock, in 1759, included Niobe, the Venus de Medici, Hercules, Ajax and Achilles "for the few". "Less refined and more ordinary tastes" were offered George II, Lord Howe, Admiral

¹⁷⁵ See Appendix II, p 218.

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix II, p 218.

¹⁷⁷ See Appendix II, p 276.

Hawke, General Wolfe, William Pitt and Admiral Boscawen.¹⁷⁸ In those days, as the *Gentleman's Magazine* commented in 1827, "the sale of plaster figures...was not so hackneyed a trade, as it has now become by the large importation of Italians" (Jacob 2011).

Once the trade had become "hackneyed," the low prices of the miniatures, the fact that trading took place in the street or at the door, and the poor reputation of the "images" all point to working-class customers. Writers on home décor, whose readers would almost certainly have been middle class, occasionally suggested a plaster of Paris figurine be purchased for some specific purpose, for example obtaining a plaster Cupid for a Valentine's day decoration but rarely recommended their general use.¹⁷⁹ An exception was Lillie Hamilton French, who in her book *Homes and Their Decoration*, extolled the virtues of plaster casts:

With discretion and little money almost any house maybe made interesting with plaster casts. This discretion, it goes without saying, it must be displayed in the choice which the buyer makes. Streets of large cities are full of image-venders; large important stores on principal avenues are now devoted to reproductions in plaster, so that one is no longer obliged to search, except for purposes of economy, in narrow side streets or tenement-house districts as one was obliged to do not so many years since.

¹⁷⁸ See Appendix II, p 206.

¹⁷⁹ See Appendix II, p 284.

French however considered the stock in trade of “image-venders” to be mixed. There were “worthless casts of diving women” but “they have among all their trash some good examples” (French 1903, 363).

Generally, “images” were to be found in “humbler” abodes around the world: the *Sydney Empire* noted in 1873 that many cottages had a table “bedizened with plaster images.” We learn from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1888 that:

*The Italian image man bore upon his head figures he had moulded in clay and painted in bright colours. There was the Virgin child, the crucifix, the Madonna, St Peter’s church at Rome, the Capitol at Washington, Jenny Lind, Daniel Webster, roosters, rabbits, dogs, etc. These images generally adorn the mantels of the servants’ rooms*¹⁸⁰

How were miniatures incorporated into daily life?

Gowans defines “social function” as “the uses of arts and artifacts in society—what they were intended for by those who commissioned them, in addition to what significance they may have for us today, either as reflections of social values in the past or as aesthetic objects in the present; in addition to whatever component of artistic expression they may have” (Gowans 1981, 16). To this I would add the uses to which they were put by those in the past who acquired them, which often differed radically from the intentions of their creators, and the ways that the objects that I study, through their agency, influenced society (a reverse view).

¹⁸⁰ Daniel Webster (1782-1852). US nationalist conservative senator and lawyer. See Appendix II, p 214

Having examined the significance of cats and parrots above I continue by looking at three miniature objects that I suggest reflect nineteenth century working-class social values. The first is a representation of a Greek and Roman goddess, Aphrodite/Venus, who embodied love, sexuality and beauty. These are traits that contrast mightily with our conceptions of working-class life in the nineteenth century, yet she stood, in one guise or another, on many a mantelpiece. The second object is Napoleon Bonaparte, who was at one time Britain's enemy, was defeated, but whose figurines remained stubbornly popular throughout the nineteenth century industrialising world. Thirdly, I discuss an object that doesn't quite fit my general argument, but is very familiar to anyone who has visited a present-day "Victorian" context – the Staffordshire dog.

Venuses

Henri Brest, French vice-consul on the Greek island of Melos, died there aged 100 in 1896. It was he who had first taken charge of the fragmentary "Venus de Milo" after its discovery some 76 years earlier. By the time he died the sculpture was dubbed by the *Pall Mall Gazette*: "the most remunerative effigy of the goddess that the world has ever known...she has acquired a pile for many peripatetic Italian image sellers" (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 4th August 1896). Soon after her first exhibition she joined the already-famous *Venus de Medici* as a popular figure on mantelpieces around the world.

Her fame, like that of the Medician Venus and others, would be easily understandable in a period of easy and rapid communications and omnipresent visual media like the present, but in the early nineteenth century it demonstrated a broad spreading of knowledge and awareness amongst working people that is difficult to explain. As an archaeological find it would have interested the *literati* of the time, but her reputation rapidly expanded far beyond. There were some political reasons: the Medician Venus had been looted by Napoleon for example. But the *Venus de Medici* was back in Italy by 1815, and the Venus de Milo was safely on display in Paris by 1821. Although one can understand copies of the various Venuses appearing in museums and galleries they also stood on many a mantelpiece, as William Hone noted, in working-class districts, along with Apollo and “other beauties of ancient sculpture” (Hone 1837, 310).



Figure 159: Venus de Medici on a mantelpiece. (detail) Rowlandson.

http://www.artchive.com/web_gallery/T/Thomas-Rowlandson/The-Honeymoon,-illustration-from-The-English-Dance-of-Death,-pub.-by-R.-Ackermann.html

Thomas Rowlandson, who looked askance on life at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, often included a mantelpiece in the

background of his interiors. In several caricatures he includes a Venus de Medici (Figure 159). We also see her being closely examined by one of Rowlandson's lascivious elderly men in his caricature *Images* (Figure 160).

Figure 160: *Images* 1820 (detail) Rowlandson.

<http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/rowlandsons-characteristic-sketches-of-the-lower-orders>

Figure 161: *Crouching Venus; Gips-Figure kauft!* 1830 (detail).

http://prometheus.uni-koeln.de/pandora/de/image/show/giessen_lri-202db348416f2f72368c0bd4b408f49f65b86ccb

Figure 162: *Townley Venus; The Image Seller* 1843. Muller.

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/william-james-müller/the-plaster-figure-seller-ZisIIFrMMjXxLvpeXSNUCw2>

Figure 163: *Venus de Medici: Figurine seller*, Murzhinsky, 1849

National Gallery of Warsaw

Figure 164: *Italian Image-Makers, New York*. (1850-60). (Sensi-Olani, pers comm)

Figure 165: *In the Sculptor's Studio*, Vittorio Rignano, before 1916.

<https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/16606/lot/96/?category=list>

Figure 166: *Les Statuettes*. 1903. French postcard.

http://cpapost.fr/fr/cartes-postales-themes-illustrateurs-photographes/10155-les-statuettes-bergeret.html?search_query=Les+Statuettes&results=1

It is possible to play “spot the Venus” throughout the nineteenth century. The “Crouching Venus” was as popular in that century as she had been in ancient Rome (Figure 161) The Venus bought by Charles Townley in 1775 appears on Muller’s image-seller’s tray (Figure 162). We can see a reversed Venus being peered at in Russia (Figure 163), Venuses being manufactured in New York (Figure 164) and Italy (Figure 165), and in various sizes on French postcards (Figure 166) (*complete images are in Appendix I*).

No vulgar gaze

The West Australian, identifying both a New Road (in London’s East End) “statuary” and “Italian image boy,” explained eloquently:

Pause before Venus de Medici with no vulgar gaze, but with admiration at so true a conception of the goddess of love and beauty and such a model for modern times. Of course the originals are perfect, but they are beyond our reach; it would be sufficient however for us if the works of ‘Phidias’ were

correctly modelled from the originals, and no matter where obtained whether from a statuary in the New Road, London, or from an Italian image boy in the streets.

(*The West Australian*, October 30th 1884)

That Venus was a familiar entity in the nineteenth century, a familiarity that ignored class boundaries, was underlined by Charles Dickens, who in *Barnaby Rudge* had his character Miggs exclaim:

“I wouldn’t,’ cried Miggs, folding her hands and looking upwards with a kind of devout blankness, ‘I wouldn’t lay myself out as she does; I wouldn’t be as bold as her; I wouldn’t seem to say to all male creeturs “Come and kiss me”-- and here a shudder quite convulsed her frame—‘for any earthly crowns as might be offered. Worlds,’ Miggs added solemnly, ‘should not reduce me. No. Not if I was Wenis.’

‘Well, but you ARE Wenus, you know,” said Mr Dennis, confidentially.

‘No, I am not, good gentleman,’ answered Miggs, shaking her head with an air of self-denial which seemed to imply that she might be if she chose, but she hoped she knew better. ‘No, I am not, good gentleman. Don’t charge me with it.’”

(Dickens 1840)

Dickens uses the familiar beauty of Venus to emphasise the contrast with the shrewish Miggs.

Where are her arms?

We learn of an 1898 encounter (probably fictional, though perhaps plausible) between an image-seller, a “swarthy son of Italy,” and a *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* newspaper office wit. Having dismissed “Napolyun ze gret” and “Vognah, de gret moosishin,” the “sporting editor” asks about “Venus duh Meelo” who costs “thirty cent-a.” The editor exclaims: “Thirty cents for an old broken plaster of paris figure? Throw it away.” The image-seller explains that the original statue doesn’t have arms: “Dah nevveh fin-a da arrums.” The editor continues the jape, telling the Italian that if he made one with arms he’d pay thirty cents for it, but “I wouldn’t give you a nickel for it in that damaged condition.” The unfortunate Italian offers the Venus for a quarter (“Dat Statue de fines’ in all de worl’. It ees wort millions dollas”) but in the end leaves, disgusted.¹⁸¹

Venus’ fame continued throughout the century. She is one of the most popular figures, amongst image-sellers, customers and amongst observers, probably because she was so recognisable. Despite the horror of an 1827 street-keeper, Venus, whether Medici or Milo, was regarded as respectable because of her “purely classical character,” as in the 1845 case of the image-seller charged with selling pornography.¹⁸² The *Pittsburgh Dispatch* considered that: “Every home with growing children should have reproduction in some form of the Venus of Milo. It is an education in itself to be brought up with it.”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ See Appendix II, p 269.

¹⁸² See Appendix II, p 165 and p 188.

¹⁸³ See Appendix II, p 256.

A good-looking woman

A tongue-in-cheek piece in an 1888 edition of the *Springfield Daily Republic*, tells of the art club that sketched the Venus of Milo “or rather a plaster image representing that lady, who is now dead.” The writer muses that the statue “is probably inaccurate, as it represents her as having no arms or hands” and complains that it isn’t worth making a statue of “people who become exhausted abruptly at the shoulder” and who have no funny bones to hit on the mantelpiece. Though “unarmed and having nothing to defend herself” Venus was nevertheless a good model and didn’t appear nervous.¹⁸⁴

So very naked

Like many of the popular figurines, both female and male, cast by the image-men, Venuses are either nude or semi-naked. This miniature state of *déshabillé* is discussed further elsewhere (*see Eroticism, p 405*), but it inspired Thomas Hardy to write a delightful passage in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), in which Sue comes across an image-seller and chooses a Venus (“of standard pattern”) and an Apollo from his stock, which included Diana, Bacchus, Mars, kings and queens, a minstrel and Cupid. Having bought the figures for “considerably less” than the ten shillings initially demanded, and the image-seller having gone on his way, Sue has second thoughts about her purchase, which suddenly “seemed so very large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked” (Hardy 1895). Her choice is likely to shock the more righteous of those around her.

¹⁸⁴ See Appendix II, p 247.

It appears that one sales ploy widely used by image sellers was to begin negotiations by asking a ridiculously high price and then abruptly dropping the price to (or accepting) a fraction of the original, without many, or any intermediate steps. This often appeared to surprise the customer into agreeing a final price, just as Sue reacted in Hardy's novel. The technique paid off in an example related by *The Evening Kansan-Republican* in 1901, where an office clerk ("winking at the others") offered a measly 50 cents for a plaster image when the image-seller was initially asking two dollars and seventy-five cents, and which the vendor instantly accepted. He was probably making at least 40 cents on the deal.¹⁸⁵

Solemn majesty

Venus de Milo possessed "wondrous loveliness" according to *The Sunday Journal* in 1903.¹⁸⁶ Nearly a century earlier, William Hone had noticed that, because of "distaste" for the badly moulded parrots and cats he scorned, "agreeable forms are now absolute requisites, and the demand has induced their supply." The Venus de Medici was one of those agreeable forms (Hone 1837, 310). Queen Victoria purchased a Venus from a "poor Italian boy" at Windsor railway station in 1853.¹⁸⁷ In 1854 George Sala mocked a publican for his enthusiasm for things "classical," telling us that "there wasn't an Italian image-man out of Leather Lane that came in to take a drop but he'd buy a Venus, or a Jenny Lind, or a Holy Family of; and these he'd stick up on gim-crack brackets under his tubs, and ask me with a simpering grin

¹⁸⁵ See Appendix II, p 272.

¹⁸⁶ See Appendix II, p 276.

¹⁸⁷ See Appendix II, p 198.

I didn't think it classical? Classical! What business has a license victualler with the classics?" (Sala 1854, 70).

Venus de Medici may have been "far-famed" in 1859 but some New York image-sellers seemingly bucked this trend for improvement by complaining that "the educated classes" were, by 1867, "quite innocent of mythology" and no longer appreciated plaster figures of Venus, the graces or Cupid, but preferred these characters in Parian or earthenware.¹⁸⁸ Plaster was then reserved for less classical individuals.¹⁸⁹ This may have been the result of poor quality, because the reporter from the *St Paul Daily Globe*, who was visiting a plaster of Paris workshop in 1885, found it difficult to identify some of the figures "that might have been the Venus of Milo or the Goddess of Liberty; at any rate they were female figures, with about as many clothes on as the females wear at some variety theaters."¹⁹⁰ Venus was still displaying her "solemn majesty" in St Paul, Minnesota in 1902.¹⁹¹ Lillie French, on the other hand, warns us that: "Very few of the small casts of the Venus of Milo... are made from beautiful models, and I have never seen a small one that did not disappoint me" (French 1903, 368).

The nineteenth century popularity of Venus, in her various miniature forms and guises, underlines a working-class enthusiasm for what social commentators at the time called "beauty", but also a level of awareness of and interest in things ancient and "classical," as well as eroticism. There also might have been elements of following "fashion", as well as effective marketing, but for those without much disposable

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix II, p 213.

¹⁸⁹ See Appendix II, p 214.

¹⁹⁰ See Appendix II, p 241.

¹⁹¹ See Appendix II, p 273.

income, every purchase of a non-utilitarian object would have to be justifiable. The presence of a plaster of Paris representation of Venus was decorative and “improving.”

Napoleons

On entering a room in her South Australian home and discovering a burglary, Mrs Piesse exclaimed “Oh dear, not only my money is gone, but Napoleon’s head is gone along with it!” (*South Australian Register*, November 12th 1856). Her distress would have been understood by many during the nineteenth century. Bonaparte was present on mantelpieces throughout the world.

Figure 167: *The Fall of Napoleon* (George Wallis, 1836). Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/collections/getrecord/WAGMU_OP486

The Fall of Napoleon is an 1836 painting by George Wallis in Wolverhampton Art Gallery. As a work of art it is not spectacular, and indeed it was reviewed rather dismissively at the time it first went on show.¹⁹² However when first exhibited it caused a stir amongst gallery visitors. It shows two sailors, one black, both presumably drunk, staggering along a pavement outside a tavern and tripping up an unfortunate image seller (deliberately?) who is coming around the corner of a building. From the image seller's tray topples a plaster figurine of Bonaparte. The use of the figurine as a visual reference to the demise of Napoleon underlines the familiarity of these objects at the time. The painting also incidentally nicely shows the arrangement of spikes or rods on the image seller's board, plus a bollard (*for the significance of a bollard, see below p 412*).

Forty per cent of the illustrations of image-sellers and their wares that I have located include at least one figurine of Napoleon. In contemporary accounts, we learn not only of the loss of Mrs Piesse's bust of her hero, but that he contributed to the fortunes made by image-sellers: Antonio Bajocci was made "a rich man" in New York, where he made "Plaster images—heads of Napoleon, of the grand Washington, of little Samuel, of Poll Parrot, and other things, which please that monster, the American people."¹⁹³

¹⁹² See Appendix I, p 37.

¹⁹³ Bajocci was probably a made-up name – bajocci were small value copper coins. See Appendix II, p 205.

Figure 168: Multiple Napoleons on the tray of the image-seller. (Detail) *Le marchand de plâtres ambulants, colporteur de figurines napoléoniennes*, 1883. Hippolyte Bellangé.

http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Wave/image/joconde/0067/m500202_atpico040010_p.jpg

Napoleon's presence is a complicated mix of loyalties and metaphors. There are many references to him in Appendices I and II: 37 images and 21 texts. Bonaparte formed part of women's "strange" taste in chimney ornaments. He stood on image-sellers' boards next to the *Greek Slave*, was exchanged for old clothes, cost 50 cents in 1889 United States, was one of the figures pulverised by the "Iconoclasts" in Elizabeth Pullen's 1895 tale, was one of the products of Erigo Guaspari in his 1903 Indianapolis workshop and was one of the moulds used by J. Pelechi in San Francisco in 1904, stood next to George Washington and Voltaire on the trays of Charles Stephen's image-boys in his 1922 novel *A Busy Year at the Old Squire's*, was part of acrobat Saqui's load that she carried on her head on the tightrope in 1843, stood motionless next to Wellington in an 1845 London "statuary," and the same year jostled green parrots and rabbits sold in France by a *Marchand de Statuettes*.

Figure 169: Napoleon and Wellington; *Very Fine, Very Cheap*, (Detail) 1815, Smith.

<http://tinyurl.com/z8tjq4>

John Thomas Smith etched a diminutive, isolated figure of the defeated Bonaparte next to a larger bust of Wellington in his 1815 *Very Fine, Very Cheap*, one of a series of illustrations of street cries (Figure 169). In this work the figurine acted as a convenient metaphor, as it did in other images.

Figure 170: *The image pedlar*, Francis William Edmonds, 1844

<http://www.nyhistory.org/exhibit/image-pedlar>

We find Napoleon in the US in Francis Edmonds' *The Image Pedlar* of 1844 (Figure 170), and multiple Napoleons in *The Figure Merchant*, the frontispiece for the 1852 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book* (Figure 171). Back in France, the title of Hippolyte Bellangé's 1883 painting *Le marchand de plâtres ambulants, colporteur de figurines napoléoniennes* (Figure 168) implies that sales were still being made towards the end of the century.



Figure 171: *The Figure Merchant*, 1852. Frontispiece for *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Despite the *Literary Gazette* considering that the French Revolution, already some five decades in the past, had had little effect, and that “the resources of art [were] not very generally employed to spread the revolutionary spirit,” Napoleon stubbornly refused to go away. The article had noted that all that remained were a few revolutionary songs, some pictures of barricades, some statues, some “paltry

lithograph portraits” and several “chalk and plaster statuettes” which it called “symbols and personifications of the Republic” (*Literary Gazette* 1850, 187). Some 160 years later, however, I noticed Napoleon and Wellington, still glaring at each other, in a Weston-super-Mare charity shop window (Figure 172).



Figure 172: Figurines of Napoleon and Wellington. Charity shop window, Weston-super-Mare, 2012. Photo, the author.

In the 1878 painting *The Veteran* by Gaetano Chierici (Figure 173), a white plaster Napoleon stands prominently alone and erect, gleaming white, on the stove, the focus of the room. On one side, an old soldier is depicted, no doubt recounting his memories of serving under Bonaparte. On the floor, children play with miniature soldiers, some of which have been knocked over. Perhaps the artist has painted a white figurine to remind us of death (many figurines of Napoleon were coloured), or merely to make the miniature stand out proudly against the humdrum, cluttered background. The painting is of course rich in allegory, perhaps played out most obviously by the ranks of miniature soldiers that mix discipline, upstanding courage and then, fallen and scatted, defeat. The old soldier communicates memory,

storytelling, not all of it perhaps accurate, failing with age. The exploits of the soldier, and his hero, are far in the past, the children represent the future, the toy soldiers represent history and remind us that Bonaparte's armies were defeated. And Bonaparte is now reduced to a ghostly figure, enshrined at the centre of the room but mute and easily broken.

Figure 173: *The Veteran*, 1878. Gaetano Chierici.

<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=28063>

The painting is important because it uses the viewers' understanding of the roles of miniatures, even when these three-dimensional objects speak "virtually," as two-dimensional painted media. The average nineteenth-century gallery visitor would have been very familiar with plaster of Paris figures, might have been accosted by image-sellers on his or her way to the exhibition. They would have been very open to the messages that the figures communicated, either intrinsically (Napoleon the

hero) or extrinsically (Napoleon the defeated anti-hero, the tragedy of war, the nostalgia and romanticism of the ex-soldier, the innocence and future potential of small children etc). A similar sentiment was expressed in Reijntjens' *Grandfather's stories of the Napoleonic War*, again painted many decades after Napoleon's death (Figure 174).

Napoleon in miniature was co-opted by other countries and other histories. For example, "between 1821 and the end of the Mexican war in 1848, Americans use[d] the image and memory of Napoleon to make sense of their past, to define an American character and to celebrate a National future" (Ehlers 2013, np).

**Figure 174: *Grandfather's stories of the Napoleonic War* (Detail) (before 1900)
Hendricus Engelberts Reijntjens.**

<https://iamachild.wordpress.com/tag/napoleon/>

George Shaw, who worked in Staffordshire potteries, recording his memories at the end on the nineteenth century, is puzzled by the popularity of Napoleon:

"I remember the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte was the leading article of our industry at this toy factory. When Napoleon was finished he stood up with

arms folded across his breast, his right leg a little forward, looking defiance at his own English makers. He had a dark blue coat on, tightly buttoned, a buff waistcoat and white breeches. There were touches of gold on his coat and on his large black hat, with flat sides and point, with a high peak. These Napoleons must have been in large demand somewhere, for shoals of them were made at that time.

It is curious how a man who thirty years before had been a veritable ogre and demon to the English people should now have become so popular. If all the Napoleons made at this toy manufactory could have had life given them, then England, if not invaded, would have been crowded by military Frenchmen, and of the dreaded Napoleonic type.

It is difficult in these days to realise how the terror of Napoleon had saturated the minds of the lower classes in England. Yet, as I looked at the figure, it only then represented a name.

(Shaw 1903, np)

Shaw's "terror" was replaced by both a grudging admiration and a sense of identification with the causes that Bonaparte espoused, and these were represented materially by the ubiquitous figurines.

Figure 175: *Il Figurinaio* (detail) 1888, Induno.

<http://www.arte.it/foto/da-boldini-a-segantini-i-grandi-maestri-dell-ottocento-italiano-in-mostra-a-milano-263/6>

When Gerolamo Induno painted a plaster figure of Napoleon positioned high up on a shelf, gazing imperiously down on the elderly *figurinaio* he was suggesting that Bonaparte was still an influence in the old man's life (Figure 175).

Napoleon in miniature, in both plaster of Paris and earthenware, probably represented undercurrents of nostalgia amongst the working classes across the industrialising world for a time of revolt against the establishment, when there was a hero who stood for the "peasants," together with a hope that the condition of the labouring classes might be improved. There were veterans who had taken part in the Napoleonic wars to whom figurines memorialised an exciting period in their lives. And there were those who, though trapped in the strictures of the capitalist system, used miniature Napoleons to indicate that, if there was revolution, they might indeed issue from their "lurking places " (Beames 1852, 67-8).

The Wally Dug

It is a visual *cliché*, an image of a Victorian fireplace (Figure 176), either side of which sit a pair of china dogs (Figure 178) “Staffordshire” dogs. It is repeated in almost every museum that includes a “Victorian parlour” (Figure 177).

Figure 176: “Staffordshire” dogs on mantelpiece in parlour of D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum.

<http://tonyshaw3.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/d-h-lawrence-in-eastwood.html>



Figure 177: “Staffordshire” dogs on mantelpiece in reconstruction in the Abbey House Museum, Leeds. Photograph, the author.

A Scots folk poem, *The Wally Dug*, tells us a little:

*I aye mind o’ that wee hoose that stood on the brae,
 Its lum was aye reekin’, its roof made o’ stray.
 The ootside was bonny, the inside was snug,
 But whit I mind best o’ was the wee wally dug.
 It stood in a corner, high up on the shelf,
 And keepit an ee on the best o’ the delf.
 It was washed twice a year, frae its tail tae its lug,
 And pit back on the shelf, was the wee wally dug.
 When oor John got mairrit tae sweet Jeannie Blue,
 The auld folks they gied him a horse an’ a coo,
 But when I left the hoose, ma hert gied a tug,
 For a’ mither gied me was the wee wally dug.
 There’s an auld saying, ‘Ne’er look a gift horse in the moo’,*

But I looked that wee dug frae its tail tae its broo'
An' a fun' a wee slit at the back o' its lug,
It was stuffed fu' o' notes, was the wee wally dug.
I tain it hame tae oor Lizzle tae pit on a shelf,
An' I telt her the worth o' that wee bit o' delf.
An' we aye feed it yet through that hole in its lug,
It's a guid bit o' stuff, is the wee wally dug.¹⁹⁴

(Traditional)

From the poem we learn that these animals did exist singly, and that they were owned by people who weren't wealthy. The small dog in question sat high up, guarding the best china (delf = delft = china) and was well cared for. The narrator is at first annoyed that his brother was given a horse and a cow when he left home, while all he received was the miniature dog. However he finds that money has been pushed into the interior of the dog through a slit in its nose, and he and his Elizabeth continue this practice. For my research, the fact that the dog was "keepit an ee" on the porcelain is significant. It brought good luck, a "guid bit o' stuff" (see *Superstition* page 401).

Staffordshire dogs are frequently seen in German and Baltic seaports. In his *Silvae* blog, Jay Loomings remembers that rather than being found on mantelpieces, "all along our street they were in the windows" (my translation) of mariners' homes. He goes on to suggest that one reason they were so common amongst seafarers (they were known as "Kapitänshunde" or "Kaminhunde" – "fireplace dogs") was that to

¹⁹⁴ Scots dialect: "lum" = chimney; "reekin" = smoking; "stray" = straw; "delf" = porcelain; "lug" = nose.

avoid being accused of exchanging sex for money, prostitutes in British ports would instead sell their clients earthenware dogs. In Germany their use by somewhat loose women led to the dogs being sometimes referred to as “*puffhunder*” or “brothel dogs” (Loomings 2013). Another function, reported from Britain, Finland and the Netherlands, was that the wife of a sailor would indicate to their lover(s) whether or not their husband was at home by the direction the figurine faced.

Figure 178: A pair of Staffordshire dogs.

<http://www.antiques.com/classified/Antique-Porcelain---Pottery/Antique-Figurines---Statues/Antique-Staffordshire-Pair-Dogs-Spaniels-A>

I have not been able to discover any Staffordshire dogs in contemporary illustrations of image sellers. Perhaps in contrast to cats, locally-produced ceramic dogs flooded and captured the market. The dogs were often large and manufactured in matching pairs; the logistics of handling both may have discouraged peripatetic image sellers. Similarly, they do not occur in many contemporary illustrations of mantelpieces. Their association with prostitution, or at least promiscuity, may have been a factor, and, because they are also called “comfort” or “comforter” dogs, one suggestion is

that they were often purchased as peace offerings when a husband returned home inebriated.

Figure 179: Daguerreotype of girl with Staffordshire dog.

<http://www.photographymuseum.com/bryshow.html>

The Staffordshire dog is an example of a miniature that has become a sort of “badge.” It is perhaps today the most familiar Victorian mantelpiece and hearth decorative object. It may have been a symbol of good luck and even, with its large, always-open eyes, an apotropaic object. But in its time it also often represented something hidden – illicit or purchased sex. It is therefore ironic that it now appears in so many “Victorian” contexts, and demonstrates the dangers inherent in interpreting a period and populations about which so little is known.

Through what they represent and what they mean to their owners, the miniature decorative objects that people acquired can provide us with evidence of their “social function.” They are “instruments furthering the ideological foundations of society” (Gowans 1981, 4). Plaster cats or parrots, Venus de Medicis, pairs of Staffordshire dogs or mysterious “Frozen Charlottes” not only act as “aesthetic objects or reflections of the spirit of their times” but also allow us to reveal and examine the “fundamental attitudes and presuppositions by which any age lives, and on which all of the institutions of every society must ultimately rest” (Gowans 1981, 4).

Taste and working-class images

Image-sellers acted as *marchands sans frontières* (or perhaps, given their origin, that should be *mercanti senza frontiera*). They appear to have been present in every country in the Old and New Worlds that possessed large working populations and both urban and rural economies. How much of this is a demonstration of “taste” – good, bad or indifferent? Stephen Bayley has asserted that taste is something of a will-o-the-wisp, not only difficult to define, but liable to change without notice, repeatedly to go out of favour, only to be revived a generation or two later. It is nevertheless important because taste is “both a mirror and a window,” allowing us to glimpse both ourselves and the lives of those around us (Bayley 1991, xiii).

Importantly for this project, Bayley goes on to claim that “taste is not so much about what things *look* like, as about the ideas that gave rise to them” (Ibid, xviii). However he displays or at least reiterates the stances of many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century middle-class writers in asking if “blue-collar workers” might wish to live in a “blaze of polychrome vulgarity” (Ibid, xviii).

What is also significant is that the core range of miniatures sold by street peddlers was identical, wherever they operated. There were of course regional variations that recognised local heroes and celebrities, and part of the success of the image sellers was that they could respond quickly to local demand. They also adjusted their stock to reflect the religious leanings of the community, Catholic or Protestant. But their cats, parrots, Napoleons and Venuses were as familiar in Russia as they were in England, North America, South America and Australia.

This commonality might indicate a limited stock of originals and that consumers across the world had to choose from what was available. This is unlikely. Although there was some centralised production of images, many itinerants took moulds with them and made new ones as demand or events necessitated. Those who operated more permanent workshops would exchange moulds when a particular design had saturated the local market. There was an element of dynamism in what makers chose to produce. They reacted to local demand. That Italian Image Boys shouted “*Belli Santi, Belli Santi!*” in France and “*Buy Images!*” in London suggests that the French customer wanted religious miniatures, while the English were more secular in their choice. The stock of the image seller in France, however, included secular items, and in the UK and North America, while secular images were headlined, their boards also included religious characters (e.g. Figure 171).

Julie Labate noted that the same “fine earthenware ceramics” – transfer-printed wares – occurred in the Five Points area of New York as in rural Ballykilcline in

Ireland. For her this link was the result of the presence of an Irish diaspora. The ownership of refined earthenware, the most expensive ceramics of the period, suggested alternative views of working-class life that “contest the notion of lower class inferiority and simple-mindedness in their approaches to life. Within their power, these individuals exerted considerable agency in their accoutrements and their surroundings” (Labate 2012).

Emulation, resistance and identity

My investigations make me think that while a demonstration of “good taste” or “class” might have been true of some middle- or upper-class families, the role of the display was also, if not principally in the case of working-class people, to reflect identity back at the objects’ owners. It is difficult to find evidence that working-class people in the nineteenth century spent much time visiting each other’s parlours, even if they had such a room. In the present, however, the largest collections of miniatures are frequently very personal and private, such as those in teenagers’ bedrooms, or the mantelpieces of the isolated elderly. In the face of criticism of lack of taste, of clutter and tawdry bric-à-brac, perhaps people’s stubborn refusal to stop accumulating these ornaments was a quiet means of resistance as well as self-identity.

Mantelpiece ornaments might blur the apparently sharp distinctions between working classes and those “above” them. After all, the same characters, it seems, though in more luxurious versions, appear on middle-class mantelpieces as on the chimney-breasts of more humble homes. One train of thought is to regard this as

evidence of “aspiration:” working class people acquiring things that mean little if anything to them other than “keeping up with the Joneses,” or displaying an imagined “gentility.” It is apparent that working class people actually knew who some, if not all, the characters they admired were. They were perhaps better educated in the classics than today’s working people, attending the many “institutes” and other educational opportunities. They also read, accessing a vast number of libraries. But these activities may not have indicated aspiration. “There is very little to suggest that the formative working-class experience was in some way communicated by or copied from the middle classes” (Thompson 1988, 84).

That ordinary people delighted in objects that possessed no utilitarian function is a phenomenon at the heart of my research. F.S. Schwarzbach identifies this delight as evidence of urban working classes’ growing “bourgeois sensibility” (Schwarzbach 2001, 42). Fellow art historian Christopher Witcombe contends that “bourgeois sensibility...demanded art with meaning or that had some purpose such as to instruct, or delight, or to moralize, and generally to reflect in some way their own purposeful and purpose-filled world” (Witcombe 2000). “Bourgeois sensibility” might imply a movement by working-class people towards the middle, what George Godwin called “striving upwards” (Godwin 1856, 305) and what many other scholars have termed “emulation.” The prevailing attitude amongst reformers was that emulation was an important driver of change and “improvement.” As Carol Harrison points out: “emulation was the key to reform [of the working class]: workers should adopt bourgeois values and practice them” (Harrison 1999, 123).

If present in the working classes, emulation would demonstrate a wish to participate in a middle-class society, a capitalist one in which, according to Julie Labate, “the upper classes are usually considered the innovators of culture” (Labate 2012).

However the working classes showed (and show) a stubborn liking for “barbarities” and continued to buy “images” when these had long gone out of favour amongst their betters. The attraction of Venuses or busts of Shakespeare was not evidence of emulation nor a cultural “innovation” but a cementing of identity, independent of what was occurring in middle classes.

In discussing commodification, Charles Orser writes that: “archaeologist Paul Mullins...investigates how mass-produced bric-a-brac recovered from African American households represents an attempt by African Americans to participate in an overwhelmingly white consumer society—into which they were simultaneously incorporated and excluded. On the one hand, the bric-a-brac represented their abilities as consumers in white society, while on the other hand they were identifiers of their positions within African American society” (Orser 2002, 119). The same can be said for working-class consumers – that they were able to acquire fripperies, and that these ornaments conformed to an identity shared with others in their communities, often scorned as being in poor taste by other classes.

Paradoxically, the working-class mantelpiece, with its collection of low-cost miniaturised versions of meaningful things, may actually have been a site of what Joanne Hollows calls “a distinctive cultural response to modernity that also *resisted* middle-class experts’ claims to cultural authority” (Hollows 2008, 25, my emphasis).

Referring to the earlier work of Lizabeth Cohen, Hollows suggests that “working-class households may have had little faith in middle-class domestic experts.” Then, as now, a plethora of “experts” threw their hands up in horror at “clutter” and promoted what is now called “decluttering.” While clutter in the middle-class home was a sign of poor taste, clutter in a working-class home was seen by these “experts” as a sign of lack of hygiene (dust) and a waste of scarce money. In contrast, an *absence* of things also horrified observers. Jill Rappoport writes of Salvation Army “Slum Sisters” recoiling from the bareness they encountered in the slums, and who “urge[d] property acquisition and attempt[ed] to turn this acquisition into a sign of spiritual salvation” (Rappaport 2011).

“Where Some of the Surplus Goes” is the caption of an illustration of a room Margaret Byington includes in her book *Homestead: the households of a mill town* (Byington 1910, 84-5). It not only features a well-draped fireplace and mantelpiece but also a harmonium. She asserts that this acquisitiveness was driven by the “desire for social sanction which finds expression in the ambition to have a well furnished parlor” (Ibid, 86). This “social sanction” was more likely the approval of their peers rather than a striving to emulate middle-class *mores*. Emma Casey points out that Colin Campbell argued that people “may desire goods for the immediate and obvious satisfactions that they produce rather than for any status these goods carry” (Casey 2016, 31). Campbell also replaced emulation with *imitation*, a practice that can be followed without any desire to “strive upwards.” One can imitate a behaviour without wishing to emulate the person you imitate.

In Homestead, a steel town near Pittsburgh, “even the six [English-speaking] families each of whom lived in three rooms attempting to have at least a semblance of a room devoted to sociability” (Byington 1910, 55). Ohmann considered that “when working-class housewives ‘achieved’ carpets, plush and clutter, I imagine they did so in proud emulation more than in resistance. Either way, middle-class ascetic was under pressure from ‘below.’” (Ohmann 1996, 147). Whilst I agree that the middle class was feeling threatened (see below) the acquisition of ornaments, the creation of clutter, was for the working classes often a mark of achievement rather than emulation.

The things that miniatures do, “exaggeration, fantasy, and fictiveness,” give voice to “anti and non-authority: the feminine, the childish, the mad, and the senile” (Stewart 1993, xiii), to whom could be added a slew of “under-dogs” such as the homeless, the orphaned, the incarcerated, the sick, the immigrant, the refugee, the slave, the powerless and the discriminated-against. A number of African-American contexts have produced Euro-American doll parts in situations that suggest religious practices that either survived from the Old World or were adapted to the New (e.g. Samford 1996). Dolls and other miniatures were used to force native children to conform to Euro-American norms, though there is evidence of resistance to this (Lindauer 2009, 99), and similarly institutions used miniatures to “educate” those in their charge again potentially creating dynamics of coercion and resistance that might show in the material culture. Stacey Camp has demonstrated that miniatures were used to mould immigrant workers to American values (Camp 2008, 2009).

Statuettes of spotted cats, or Venuses, or Shakespeares, confer no obvious advantage or superiority on their owners. Indeed it could be said that they do the reverse, as, in the eyes of many commentators, they communicate poor or bad taste. Nevertheless they were (and are) attractive to very many. Perhaps their owners purchased them out of habit, conformity or the following of fashion. Although possible, this is unlikely in a community that had little disposable income, where every farthing counted. Perhaps they were acts of complicity. The culture of knick-knacks and bric-à-brac could be a conscious or unconscious grouping in opposition to the establishment, and the objects on the mantelpiece act as badges, signals both to their owners and to any visitors from different classes:

I would also stress the creative element of working-class appropriation of these objects. I mean appropriation in its root, literal sense--making something one's own. De Certeau warns against "the illusion" that the masses are simply passive victims of 'expansionist production' and challenges us 'to discover creative activity' in the lived reality of everyday consumption (de Certeau 176, 167)

(Schwarzbach 2001, 48)

For more than two hundred years, people—reformers, decorators, commentators, busybodies, do-gooders, snobs and social risers—have been railing against objects of bad taste, clutter, unhygienic furniture and decorations. In my regular visits to charity shops, I see as much evidence of what some would call bad taste, kitsch, vulgarity and bad design as ever. Over a hundred years ago, as Cohen points out: “Since domestic reformers were promoting a simpler esthetic at the turn of the

[twentieth] century, they denounced workers' taste for ornamentation" (Cohen 1980, 767). Those denunciations had little effect, for working people throughout the world continued to acquire "horrors" of bric-à-brac to display in front of their wallpaper. That stubborn refusal to adopt good taste has survived to this day. It seems there was and is a sort of "bloody-mindedness" about this: "We're working-class and proud of it, and we reject your tastes. If it's bad to you, that means that it's good to us!" The mantelpiece became a badge of identity and working class achievement rather than a desire to ape middle-class values.

Lizabeth Cohen believes that "working-class material values have emerged through both resistance and adaptation to the social environment (Cohen 1980, 772). There is a paradox here. F.S. Schwarzbach writes "If, precisely at mid century, a figurine on the mantelpiece of the working-class home might be seen as a symbolic representation of respectability, only a decade or two later they betoken the debasement of working-class taste for cheap gimcracks and gewgaws...The figurines and the parlors both became for working-class families a necessary part of the domestic interior just as for their social 'betters' they became a sign of an apish and wasteful craving after social distinction' (Schwarzbach 2001, 46). I would however argue that the concept of "debasement" is a middle-class one. The working classes simply carried on as before. While the middle classes sneered at what they perceived as working-class aspiration, the working classes stubbornly and deliberately continued (and continue) to use these objects as a tool of identity, of *resistance* to aspiration. F.M. Thompson writes, in *The Rise of Respectable Society*:

“those workers who could afford it were simply pursuing their happiness and pleasures in ways of their own choosing” (Thompson 1988, 81).

“Lurking places:” the threat of revolution

As working people became more affluent, increasingly engaged in consumerist behaviours and therefore, in theory, more powerful, the accumulation and enjoyment of bric-à-brac was seen as evidence of a perceived threat. The middle- and upper classes, outnumbered, worried that the burgeoning working classes now had the time and energy to listen to revolutionary thought.

While the incomes of most working people were limited, the wages of some skilled artisans were higher than many a middle class clerk. Urban streets were crowded with hawkers, the markets busy, a plethora of small retail businesses often prospering. There was anxiety throughout the century that as working classes became materially successful and educated French-style revolution would be possible. Thomas Beames expressed the fear of revolution amongst middle- and upper-classes when he wrote, conjuring up the image of the bullet-riddled St Antoine¹⁹⁵: “...when rebellion recruits her forces she is fed by the denizens of [rookeries]. It is on record that during the combats in Paris in 1848, and on the famous 10th of April here, multitudes of strange figures issued from these lurking places, distinguished by their appearance from the rest even of the poor population. They bide their time; the agitator calls, and ‘they will come when he doth call’”

¹⁹⁵ Presumably referring to the Bastille?

(Beames 1852, 67-8). Cluttered mantelpieces, with figurines of Napoleon and other anti-establishment figures would have fed this unease.

In the final verse of a satirical poem published in Volume II of *Punch* (1842) we are told that:

*I patronise the Sunday-schools,
And always wish, indeed,
To get the children pious tracts
And testaments to read.
But yet when at the bookseller's
I call for Scott or Moore,
Some servant buys the very same—
Such books destroy the poor!*

The anonymous poet was commenting on the prevailing attitude that the poor should know their place, and the anxiety that they might be getting “notions.” It is revealing that the working classes should be reading Thomas Moore and Walter Scott (Anon 1842, 195). Miniatures of both Thomas Moore and Walter Scott were to be found amongst the stock of Italian image-sellers.

Identity: the miniature as “selfie”

There was a time before mirrors, when Narcissus could only gaze on his reflection in still water. Mirrors revealed an image of the self, at least in a horizontally-reversed version, to those who could afford them. A privileged few could have portraits painted, though these were constrained by the skill of the artist, who could also

paint self-portraits. Then came photography, and the ability, at first restricted to the well-off, to capture images in black and white, not only of the world and its inhabitants, but also of the photographer. The advent of the box camera extended this activity to everyone, and eventually colour emulsions and now digital technologies allowed a reasonably accurate replication of one's exterior appearance, at least in two dimensions.

One of the unforeseen effects of the smartphone and its sophisticated a readily-accessible camera has been the explosion of "selfies", much scorned by arbiters of taste, but nevertheless hugely popular. Now, using scanning and 3D printing technologies, it is possible, and increasingly affordable, to create three-dimensional representations of oneself. I had mine made in an ASDA supermarket in York (Figure 5). It sadly reproduces, in reasonably accurate miniature, a mature bloke of average size and shape, though I of course secretly would like it to express a completely different fantasy image, one of a debonair, handsome, dashing *flaneur*.

Figure 180: Self portrait using mirror and box camera, 1900 (detail).

<http://thedreamwithinpictures.com/blog/mirror-self-portraits-from-the-early-days-of-photography>

Figure 181: Group self-portrait using wide-angle lens, 1909 (detail) (Feinberg 2014).

These technologies weren't available in the nineteenth century, but the popularity of the selfie today indicates something essentially human in wanting some sort of *presence*. I suggest that for many in the past, the miniature, though not a representation of the individual, nevertheless acted as *a representation of how the individual saw herself/himself*. In the midst of a poverty, it is easy to imagine that we have a swashbuckling streak like Dick Turpin, or are heroic like Nelson, revolutionary like Napoleon, or intellectual, or poetic, or beautiful, or famous. Perhaps the link is less direct: this miniature person/thing represents my attitude(s), my politics, my faith, my sense of humour. The presence of an ancient Greek goddess speaks to me of my taste, of being cultured. This representation didn't have to be realistic. One can imagine that one has the courage of a lion, the grace of a ballerina, the strength of Hercules, the beauty of Venus.

Memory

Figurines became adornments of the domestic interior where the mantelpiece was the place of the celebration of beauty and a repository of memory

(McWilliam 2005, 109)

The *Daily Mail* recently published an OpEd bemoaning the undignified growth of the placing of toys and trinkets on the graves of children. It seems that more and more objects are being placed on graves, most of which are miniatures – small scale humans, animals, fairies and the like (Figure 182 and Figure 183). These material and sometimes exuberant displays are a phenomenon that could be related to the placing of objects within burials that has been common since prehistoric times. Even in death we are closely linked with things.



Figure 182: Miniatures on a grave, Weston-super-Mare 2012. Photograph, the author.



Figure 183: Miniatures on a grave, Epperstone, Nottinghamshire. 2016. Photograph, the author.

The objects are a public manifestation of grief. Although grief is a very personal emotion, some feel that it is not enough to grieve in private. Grief demands to be marked by material and long-lasting tokens that are visible to others, to whom the dead person is usually unknown. The death of a child is especially poignant, and demands to be marked by objects that reflect both childhood and the personality of the lost child, at least as imagined by their parents (Figure 184). The objects become representative of a life and can act as material memories.



Figure 184: Miniatures on a grave, Leicester. Photograph, the author.

Some objects will be things the dead person owned, held, played with, delighted in. Though the bereaved will have memories of the lost one, tangible objects may seem to encapsulate memory as firmly if not more so than mental ones. Some graves include objects that are appropriate for an age beyond the life of the deceased, so acting as “memories” of what activities the dead person might or would have engaged in had they lived. They are memories of activities that never took place. There are instances where people have placed age-appropriate objects on the graves of children whose parents could not afford the gesture (Mayer 2012). In this case the donors are “inventing” memories that had not and would not exist. Unfortunately these material memories can be untidy, and cemetery authorities regularly attract opprobrium by demanding that these objects are removed. That objects possess something more than just the material of which they are

constructed is underlined by a ceremony that took place in 1929. *The Illustrated London News* published an account of a ceremony at the Imperial Primary School in Sugamo, Japan, during which children paid respects to their broken and lost toys, mostly dolls (Ptak 2008). This is another distinctive example of objects being imbued with “life” and logically, therefore being subject to “death.”

Rural memories

Some miniatures represent life that had never existed, or existed only as a false memory or as a fantasy. The move from rural to urban life during the industrial revolution led to nostalgia for an unrealistic existence. In the output of British potteries during the century (especially its first half) we see shepherds and shepherdesses, swains and damsels, often accompanied by “bocage,” a stylised vegetation. The same is true of plaster of Paris objects, though vegetation is unusual. While wild animals are rare, domesticated animals are common in both ceramics and plaster of Paris.

Changing and enduring tastes

“You have often met him along the sidewalks, beside the quays or on street corners, with his board and its rope handrail” *Le Magazin Pittoresque* reported in 1850 in an article on *Le Marchand de Figures de Plâtre* (Charton 1850, 588; my translation) Declaring that plaster figurines are the sculptural equivalent of barrel organ music, the writer turns their attention to the “outdoor exhibitions” of the image-sellers

that give us an idea of the concerns of the common man, and allow us to follow “oscillations of taste and popularity” (Ibid)

Eduard Charton describes how on the image-seller’s “portable museum” stood a changing cast of characters: “busts and statuettes of great men, familiar caryatids destined to ornament modest apartments.” Charton remembers that earlier in the century the boards “were covered with princes and marshals as well as busts of Paul and the Virgin, dogs with nodding heads and white rabbits.” These were replaced by Bolivar, General Foy, Voltaire and Rousseau, to be followed by gothic figures when the Middle Ages became popular, and later Goethe, Schiller, Byron, Joan of Arc and la Pompadour. “Most literary and political celebrities appeared there...soon to descend and disappear...we simply cast our admiration or our whims of the moment in plaster, as if we wanted to fragility of the material and of what it represents” Charton continues. “Alas! How many of these reputations even outlasted plaster! Those great men who disappeared before their busts; who became out of date before being yellowed by time!...The moulder is a strict judge...he ruthlessly breaks the moulds of anyone who is no longer in vogue” (Ibid).

Charton concludes that “the image-seller is really important in our modern civilisation; he spreads art, the education of the eyes, and he unknowingly improves popular taste...the visual arts are spreading increasingly into ordinary life; after having been the privilege of noble and wealthy homes, they are now embellishing the humblest existences” (Ibid).



Figure 185: *Plaster figurine seller, 1850, Le Magasin Pittoresque.* Note the three (at least) Napoleons and the seller's padded hat.

Just as there were divergent opinions throughout the nineteenth century as to whether or not image-sellers were becoming extinct or were on the increase, so too tastes were either in decline or improving. Horace Smith, writing in 1830, declares that:

You must surely remember, reader, unless the mother of the Muses have deserted you, that a few years ago our English modellers carried about an wretched collection of painted plaster dolls, lions, monsters, shapeless allegorical nondescripts, with here and there a sprawling whole-length cross-

legged Milton or Shakespeare stiffly leaning over a tablet on which was inscribed an extract from their respective works

(Smith 1830, 16)

William Hone declared that he had noticed a significant change of taste early in the century, with a move away from once “desirable images” of crude “polly” parrots, bow pots, dogs and cats, towards casts of young boys reading and writing (Hone 1837, 310). John Thomas Smith, too, wrote in 1849 that “public taste has improved considerably” with a move from the “absurdity” of painted cats and parrots to busts of poets, painters, musicians and illustrious men “very beautifully executed” as well as “copies of some of the finest models of the antique” (Smith 1849, 11-12). Henry Mayhew was also full of admiration for the improvement in the tastes of working people, which he decided had moved on from “rude green parrots” (Mayhew 1851 217).

These apparent changes in taste were, however, still apparently happening much later. A writer in the *Indianapolis Journal* in 1879 was convinced that “the higher colors of a few years ago are no longer au fait. Plaster of Paris fruit-pieces and parrots in the uncompromising cardinal colours green, red and yellow, have had their day.”¹⁹⁶ There is still a prominent cat and Napoleon on the board of the image seller in True Williams’ 1888 illustration of *an Italian Image Boy*, and the various objects he is hawking would have been familiar to a someone in a Holborn street a century earlier (with the exception perhaps of some local celebrity or other).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ See Appendix II, p 250.

¹⁹⁷ See Appendix I, Figure A1.78, p 101.

Calboli tells us that there was a change late in the century in France, where the works of Falguière, Paul Dubois, Saint-Marceaux and Frémiet became more popular than representations of ancient statues. Napoleon was still there though (Calboli 1909, 116).

The objects themselves might change identity rather than form. Sala remembers in 1859 a hollow plaster of Paris cottage “of latitudinarian architecture” with stained glass windows and a working chimney. A lamp is placed inside “and the light pouring through the windows, and the smoke curling up the chimney (not altogether inodorously), produce a charming effect.” “This building has many names” William Tell’s chalet, the Birthplace of the poet Moore, Shakespeare’s House, Her Majesty’s Highland Hut or Shieling, Near Balmoral, Scotland, now the Birthplace of Mrs Harriet Beecher Stowe” (Sala 1859, 192). There was, too, a churn of notables. In 1867, “the great American people at large” were buying figurines of Broadway characters instead of goddesses, according to the *New York Post*. While Washington was still popular, Lincoln, Grant, Sherman and Sheridan less so, others were “played-out.” Daniel Webster had gained plaster oblivion.¹⁹⁸

Schwarzbach writes that “it is important to know precisely when and why it was [figurines] went so decisively out of fashion in lower-class homes” (Schwarzbach 2001, 45). I suggest instead that there was no decisive change in taste. There was a change in focus amongst writers and commentators, perhaps paralleling the rise of photography, but as the paintings of Charles Spencelayh, and New York crime scene

¹⁹⁸ Though to demonstrate the fickleness of taste, he was still for sale 20 years later in 1888 Brooklyn (See Appendix II, p 246).

photographs and other sources show, figurines continued to be displayed on “lower-class” mantelpieces on into the twentieth century, and the image-sellers continued their diminishing trade long enough to be photographed in the streets of Paris just before the second world war.¹⁹⁹

Power

Figure 186: The Swartzell railroad: O gauge gods, 1929. (Washington DC: National Photo Company Collection).

<http://www.shorpy.com/node/7789>

Whilst some researchers stress the dreamlike fantasy aspects of miniaturisation (Bachelard 1958, 149) they fail to recognise the sheer power afforded to puny humans simply through being bigger than miniatures, being able to acquire them

¹⁹⁹ See Appendix I, p 135.

rather than the full-sized originals they represent, being able to use them to secure and reinforce identity, to manipulate and arrange them to create miniature environments, and even, in the case of model railways, dolls houses and the like, to create whole worlds over which to rule as omnipotent gods and goddesses (Figure 186).

People with little disposable income may have used miniatures to create a tiny pocket of material culture over which they had power, both in relative size but also in having the freedom to arrange and manipulate the objects as they willed. At a time when there was little security, they could also move this assemblage from place to place and hearth to hearth, re-creating their personal space in each new dwelling. Similarly, the objects themselves seem to have power, a power that their small size appears to concentrate, so they are alluring, thought-provoking performers on the stage of the mantelpiece that offer us comfort and keep us company, as well as communicating back to us our sense of self.

We are seeing the past through biased, usually middle class eyes. Even when the writer was working class, they either don't record functionless materiality, or they disparage it, as does Robert Roberts in his account of his shopkeeper father's overmantel in the early twentieth century, a rant worth examining:

There was a marked division between those houses which had an overmantel and those possessing no more than a plain shelf above the fireplace. The overmantel, mirrored, and laddered with brackets, displayed a mass of tawdry ornaments, the more the better. Our own specimen the neighbours

classed as 'a work of art'. Every Christmas my father invited favoured tick customers in turn into the kitchen and gave each a tot of Dumville's Special.²⁰⁰

The guest, much honoured, sat on the edge of her chair, sipped whisky and eyed all about her in humble admiration. First the brass chandelier, a mass of twirled metal and variegated knobs (this my father had made himself). He would demonstrate how its three upright gas mantles (classier than the inverted type) could be raised almost to the ceiling or lowered by means of three large pear-shaped weights. Then his guest would eye in wonder a repulsive, three-foot-square print of the 'Battle of Quatre Bras' and after that, the piano with its gilded candlesticks; but most of all the opulent show of bric a brac on the overmantel.²⁰¹ This homage to our family possessions seemed to give the old man much satisfaction.

(Roberts 1971, 18)

Roberts remembers the ornaments as “tawdry,” yet showing them off meant a lot to his father. He calls the display of bric-à-brac an “homage” to the family’s possessions, almost as if the overmantel and the objects ranged on it formed a shrine before which the supplicants, or honoured customers, knelt. But perhaps the overriding “satisfaction” was the result of a demonstration of power over those individuals who were in his debt. After all, Roberts senior had attained that badge of nineteenth century achievement, a piano! It is also significant that the neighbours

²⁰⁰ “Tick” was slang for credit. These were trusted customers who had bought from Roberts “on tick” and who owed him money. *Dunville's Special* was a liqueur whisky blended in Belfast by Dunville & Co, founded by John Dumville, who changed the spelling of his surname in the 1820s. It may be that the original spelling survived in common parlance into the Edwardian period about which Roberts was writing (or perhaps it was simply a typo).

²⁰¹ The Battle of Quatre Bras was fought between the French and an allied army of British, Germans, Dutch and Belgians, two days before the battle at Waterloo, 1815.

called the overmantel a “work of art,” again underlining the common use of the word to describe something different from a picture hanging in a gallery. Here it might have been used ironically, but even if it was, there was a recognition of the achievement of something out of the ordinary, and the creation of the “opulent show of bric a brac” was a success (Roberts 1971, 18).

Mayhew also judged people on their displays of knick-knacks. Writing about the Irish in London, he admitted that “In all the houses that I entered were traces of household care and neatness that I had little expected to have seen” and amongst the objects that gave “an air of comfort” was “the mantelpiece with its images” (Mayhew 1851, 110). A few years earlier, Reynolds, in his *Mysteries of London*, wrote that “it is a matter for thankfulness that even in the poorest classes of homes there is, as a rule, some attempt at ornamentation” (Reynolds, 1845, 311).

Sentimentality

“Shells were also placed on the mantelpieces for decorative purposes, alongside a great array of sentimental figurines of poodles, cottages, lambs, ladies, and angels sheltering little children under their wings”

(Karskens 2001, 76)

Sentimentality has a “bad rap.” One current definition of sentimentality reads: “exaggerated and self-indulgent tenderness, sadness, or nostalgia” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It is generally seen as an undesirable excess of something, and anything of which the working classes had an excess was treated with suspicion, if not fear.

Hence the disapproval of the ample material evidence of tender feelings being displayed on mantelpieces.

As an example of the sentimental, Cupid occurs frequently amongst image-sellers' wares throughout the century. He was there in Reynold's description of a "statuary," "point[ing] his arrow at the bosom of a pope" (Reynolds 1845, 173). He was also one of the innocent plaster casts "intended for the *profanum vulgus*" in the stock of an image seller arrested for selling indecent medallions in 1845.²⁰² According to the *Los Angeles Herald*, "a statuette or a plaster cast of Cupid" was held to be "a more up to date love token" for Valentine's Day in "the progressive year of 1908" than "creations of lace paper and hand-painted satin."²⁰³ The paper tells us that "statuettes of Cupid have long been among the most cherished art objects in many American homes" and could be purchased for one or two dollars. The *Sunday Oregonian* in 1910 found "dainty eight-inch" plaster images of "Master Cupid" for just 25 cents to use as table decorations during celebrations of the same event.²⁰⁴ We see him being sold in the streets of Paris.²⁰⁵

The chubby infants are examples of a genre that ensured that naked or nearly-naked children featured on many mantelpieces. In his 1837 article, William Hone, having suggested that by 1826 the popularity of mantelpiece figures of cats and parrots was waning, was equally sniffy about their replacements, and provided an illustration of the latest trend, a pair of little boys, one reading, the other writing (Figure 187). The

²⁰² *profanum vulgus* = the common people. See Appendix II, p 188.

²⁰³ See Appendix II, p 281.

²⁰⁴ See Appendix II, p 284.

²⁰⁵ See Appendix I, Figure A1.100, p 122.

bronze originals of this pair (*Enfant lisant; Enfant dessinant*) were created by Charles-Gabriel Sauvage at the end of the eighteenth century (Figure 188), but they have been reproduced almost continuously in various media, porcelain, bronze, Parian, and most recently, resin for over 200 years (Figure 189).



Figure 187: *Street Images in 1826* (Hone 1837).

Figure 188: *Enfant lisant; enfant dessinant*, 1781. Sauvage. Louvre.
http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=16482

Figure 189: Little boy writing, little boy reading 2016, resin.

<http://www.ebay.com/itm/-/161274847260?roken=cUgayN>

The same figurine can be seen amongst the wares of William Muller's *The Image Seller* of 1843 and Hugh Cameron's 1862 *The Italian Image Seller*.²⁰⁶ Their French titles probably explains their absence from any written accounts, unlike *The Infant Samuel at Prayer* (Figure 190), a figure that reproduced in three dimensions the subject of Sir Joshua Reynolds' painting *The Infant Samuel* (1776).

Figure 190: The Infant Samuel Praying (left). (Detail) *The Italian Image Seller*, 1862. Cameron.

<https://www.scholarsresource.com/browse/work/2144662027>

²⁰⁶ See Appendix I, Figure A1.37, p 45 and Appendix I, Figure A1.64, p 84.

In C.F.O.'s saccharine account of a "poor Italian boy" we are told of "yonder mechanic" whose "clear eye looks with pleasure on [Samuel's] innocent upturned countenance."²⁰⁷ Samuel was purchased from an image boy in 1853 by Queen Victoria.²⁰⁸ "The plaster image of little Samuel saying his prayers in a nightshirt with a stubby-nosed angel in a bolster-case watching him" was hurled at wailing cats in 1874.²⁰⁹ "Curiously-wrought infants at prayer" were sold outside New Orleans cemeteries in 1875.²¹⁰ "San Samuele saya his oration" was offered by the image-seller in *The Iconoclast* of 1895.²¹¹ P. G. Wodehouse refers to *The Infant Samuel at Prayer* at least eight times in his novels, beginning in 1908, and the Dutch Wodehouse Society ceremoniously destroyed a statuette of Samuel "as a cure for aunts" and/or "anger" (P. G. Wodehouse Society web site). Wodehouse used the figurine "to embody the kind of class-bound nineteenth-century religiosity he satirizes" (Lerer 2009, 121 note 24). I suggest that what was "religiosity" in the middle classes, Wodehouse's target, was sentimentality in the working classes. The miniatures of Samuel, the Guardian Angel and other mawkish semi-religious statuettes ran parallel to the strongly-religious imagery of Madonnas and saints. It is likely that they also appealed to non-Catholic working classes. Showing that both Italian image-sellers and sentimentality were ubiquitous and went hand-in-hand, Samuel, along with the Sleeping Beauty, appeared on the dusty streets of the Australian gold-rush town of Bendigo in 1859.²¹² Strangely, unlike the Sauvage boys,

²⁰⁷ See Appendix II, p 196.

²⁰⁸ See Appendix II, p 199.

²⁰⁹ See Appendix II, p 218.

²¹⁰ See Appendix II, p 230.

²¹¹ See Appendix II, p 263.

²¹² See Appendix II, p 204.

the Infant Samuel figurine has since vanished (those smashed by the P.G. Wodehouse Society had to be specially made), although reproductions of the original painting are still available. Taste is unreliable.

Sentimental miniatures of little children in varying degrees of *déshabillé* continued to be popular - two can be seen on the tenement shelf in Figure 72, bracketed oddly by figurines of British royalty. There are elements of mawkishness here, as well as an eroticism that would probably raise surprised and horrified eyebrows if pointed out. Similar figures available today disguise their eroticism by presenting their subjects as mythical beings, especially fairies and elves, as cartoonish characters, especially those from anime and similar media, or as ballet dancers and the like (*see page 42*). That eroticism surrounding children and underage teenagers that is evident today (*see page 45*) was no doubt present on the nineteenth century mantelpiece.

On the whole, however, sentimentalism had boundaries that blurred with the popular genres of classical themes –choosing a bust of Clytie could be an act of good taste, beautification, intellect or sentimentality. She might, like other classical figures, be regarded as the equivalent of a “pin-up.” Of course that she could be any of these, and it was important that people had time and opportunity within challenging lives to be sentimental, that they were fond enough of little children to celebrate them on their mantelpieces, even in ways that could be dismissed as mawkish by their “betters.”

Bric-à-brac: objects of dubious virtue

Not all objects can be read in the same way. This is because some of them are bric-à-brac

(Shears and Harrison 2013, 2)

Objects acquired new importance as they became more numerous during the Industrial Revolution. People began to be identified by the things with which they surrounded themselves, as well as using objects to create aspects of their own identities. When those objects were regarded as “*bric-à-brac*,” they conferred a number of attributes on their owners, not all of them, according to contemporary observers, positive. *Bric-à-brac* possesses a form of agency. Viewed and defined by one group, those individuals claiming the ability to measure “good taste,” it confers on another group, its owners, a cluster of characteristics including “poor taste.” Of course, to their owners, the objects almost certainly meant something completely different, usually positive. They were not originally desired and acquired *because* they were *bric-à-brac*, but for the slew of reasons that this study explores. The deliberate acquisition of objects defined as *bric-à-brac* or *kitsch* is a twentieth century phenomenon.

Bric-à-brac is a word of (probable) French origin that may have originally been neutral in meaning but in the nineteenth century acquired an air of disapproval.²¹³

²¹³ I have used the spelling *bric-à-brac* throughout but followed the spellings used by quoted authors.

Bric-a-brac was a general term that advisors used to refer to a catalogue of decorating errors.

(Leavitt 2002, 118).

We can learn something of its various meanings by looking at its etymology. This 1881 answer to a question in the journal *Notes and Queries* is more positive than most: “The word probably comes from an old French expression, *de bric et de brogue*, which, literally translated, means from right and from left—from hither and thither...of late years it has been used to indicate objects of artistic value, made in olden times, and esteemed by modern collectors” (Sikes 1881). It has also been suggested that the word is onomatopoeic, resembling the sound of breaking or rattling ceramics.

I have been able to find hardly any nineteenth century or present-day writing that extols the *virtues* of everyday ornaments – *bric-à-brac*, knick-knacks, trinkets and the like – other than the enthusiastic outpourings of present-day consumers of “collectibles” (or “collectables”). A rare exception is Harriet Spofford, who in her book *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture*, despite being generally cautious about the presence of *bric-à-brac*, when writing in 1878 about “our thousand and one fancy things” admits that “all these *babioles* can be made to illuminate a room and help its picturesque idea, even if they amount to nothing at all in the eyes of a dealer in *bric-a-brac*” (Spofford 1878, 224). Generally, however, almost since these objects began to be mass-produced, they attracted a stream of disdain, scorn and invective, some of it simply belittling, some dismissive, some downright aggressive.

The same is true of more recent commentators, though the criticism is perhaps more muted and often just implied. “In the twentieth century writers sometimes recoiled in mock horror from the bric-a-brac and whatnots, the proliferation of ornaments that seemed to crowd the parlour. In 1933, for instance, Osbert Lancaster referred to the “objects of dubious virtue” that “the jackdaw strain inherent in every true Victorian led to the constant acquisition of” (Logan 2001, 8).

Nineteenth-century bric-à-brac: all monsters and dust

During the nineteenth century, attitudes toward bric-à-brac were divided between jocular and hectoring, with, in between, plenty of unasked-for advice thrown in.

“What a load of rubbish! Utterly worthless I should say...just now, of course. But I shall leave it to my son, and he to his son. In the day of my grandson it will be bric-a-brac!”

(Manawatu Standard, NZ, May 13th 1902)

In 1889, an anonymous piece published in an Australian local newspaper, *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, looked back at earlier in the century and remembered “old fashioned bric-a-brac,” which was displayed on a piece of furniture, the “whatnot,” rather than the mantelpiece: “Upon these shelves the household bric-a-brac was placed. The ornaments were not graceful and costly Worcester ware, or Dresden china, or silver and gold ornaments.” Instead the whatnot contained “a motherly-looking old hen of white china...china dogs and sheep and highly coloured, puffy-faced angels and seraphim.”

The *New York Times* published at least two stories about bric-à-brac that presumably reflected the opinions of many of its readers. According to the first, bric-à-brac, while difficult to define, could be regarded as “elegant rubbish.” Echoing the theme of this section, the writer continues “it is essential to the bric-a-bracarity of a thing that it should be utterly useless...a room cumbered and cluttered with bric-a-brac is an offence” (*New York Times*, July 12th 1875). The second *NY Times* piece claims that the late nineteenth century was “The Age of Bric-à-brac” and the writer reported an “invasion of bric-à-brac” much of which was “inexpressibly ugly”. Ugliness was “the fashion,” pointing to the popularity of “pug-dogs” (“the puggier the dog, the more ‘swell’ he is”). The article defines bric-à-brac as “anything that is quaint and ugly” and reports that drawing-rooms were becoming “curiosity shops” (Anon 1879). The article was probably focusing on middle-class *mores*, but what it describes almost certainly applied to working class homes.

Spofford warns that it was possible to achieve “a perfect Sodom of worthless baubles” but this can be avoided by the presence of “a single righteous individual” in the shape of “some small but characteristic treasure.” But she warns against “the presence of a multitude of the smaller affairs that have no especial value, for they declare a too eager love of acquisition and a less fastidious taste than full purse” (Spofford 1878).

Bric-à-brac was often the inspiration for humour. An anonymous poet in an Australian local newspaper of 1883 uses a familiar nineteenth century scenario: a bashful young man and a frightening young lady, and also includes an unworthy

older rival in love to poke fun at both clutter and the social posturing of the times: “For my fair Elsie was cultured/In the most aesthetic style...And her bric-a-brac collection/Was the treasure of her heart.” The courtship ends in disaster when the young man “toppled o’er a table/Full of strange Pompeian-ware,” and the young lady was left “To the worship of her art” and to marry “old Golding... flabby, fat, and sixty—So a valuable antique.”²¹⁴

Oscar Wilde joined the nineteenth century’s contempt of bric-à-brac: “...the mind of the thoroughly well-informed man is a dreadful thing. It is like a bric-a-brac shop, all monsters and dust, with everything priced above its proper value” (Wilde 1890, 10). Mark Twain quotes those who made fun of “Byng, who wrote a book called ‘The Bric-a-Brac Hunter,’” and who chased “after what they choose to call ‘his despicable trifles;’ and for ‘gushing’ over these trifles; and for exhibiting his ‘deep infantile delight’ in what they call his ‘tuppenny collection of beggarly trivialities’” (Twain 1890, 187). Another humourist, and rival of Mark Twain, also brought up the problem of bric-à-brac in his book *Elbow-room*: “My wife is the most infatuated bric-a-brac hunter I ever heard of... she’s filled my house with the wildest mess of bric-a-brac and such stuff you ever came across outside of a museum of natural curiosities” (Clark 1870).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, those who had experienced the *fin de siècle* were cautioning ever more strongly against bric-à-brac. Lillie Hamilton French wrote: “I sometimes believe that the proper furnishing of a parlor means nothing

²¹⁴ See Appendix II, p 234.

less than a question of ethical values or a problem in psychology” (French 1903). “If there is an excess in this period, it is found oftenest in the use of decorative ornamental bric-a-brac” writes Parsons (Parsons 1916 np). We are told that “‘foolish’ bric-a-brac, calendars, photographs and general litter should especially be weeded out”(Eberlein *et al* 1919, 182) and that “innumerable inappropriate grotesqueries, decoratively intended, must be severely dealt with and banished either to the ash-barrel, the store-room, or the gift-box” (Quinn 1914, 54).

The French psychiatrist Valentin Magnan, noting a “rage for collecting, the piling up in dwellings, of aimless bric-a-brac...established an irresistible desire among degenerates to accumulate useless trifles” (Saisselin 1984, 62).²¹⁵ That these objects possess some sort of devilish agency that “must be severely dealt with” is echoed by the appetite of the “whatnot” lurking in the corner: “The old-fashioned ‘whatnot’ with its hungrily gaping shelves, is responsible for many crimes committed in the name of bric-a-brac, and calls to mind sundry specimens with which proud owners were wont to satisfy its greed” (Laughlin 1912).

Bric-à-brac still had its supporters, including “W.B.G.” in a 1902 edition of the journal *Amateur Work: A Monthly Magazine Of The Useful Arts And Sciences*: “It makes the home our home. These small, or even large, decorative accessories are in a way the outgrowth of the *lares* and *penates* of the old Romans. In fact, some of the very clay images that the old Romans used as their household gods, now grace the cabinets and mantels of our own homes. But art objects have another use. They

²¹⁵ Valentin Magnan (1835-1916) was a French psychiatrist who studied “degeneration.”

are the final touch, the bit of addition that makes or unmakes all the rest” (WBG 1902, np).

Trash and trumpery

It is the bric-a-brac, the curious trifles, the movable ornaments and gewgaws used for filling up the picture, for giving an enhanced brilliancy, and creating interest — the things that “notable housewives” call trash and trumpery—that have about as much to do with the impression a room conveys as the heavier articles and their arrangement do. Indeed, a few moments’ observation in the drawing-room of any family will usually give much information concerning the grade of that family’s culture by nothing more than the character of the bric-a-brac to be seen there

(Spofford 1879, 224)

Before the Industrial Revolution and the growth of mass-production, elites could be confident that their position in society was not only secure but was tangibly and visibly far more materialistic than the “lower orders.” Their homes were furnished with expensive decorative objects and often-highly decorated utilitarian objects.

Where once there was a huge, uncrossable gap between the elites and the lowest classes, during the nineteenth century that chasm began to disappear. It was bridged first of all by an expanding, economically-active middle class, keen to demonstrate that it shared many of the features of the upper classes – for example, manners, respectability and culture. For a while the lowest classes could be kept in

their place by austerity, but inevitably the capitalist system demanded that they become consumers. Class distinction could no longer be based solely on the possession of non-utilitarian objects, because ownership of these now depended mostly on income rather than “taste.” Mass-production increased the availability of cheap and cheerful purely decorative objects, leading to the necessity to create less easily crossed barriers of taste in order to demonstrate moral, cultural and intellectual superiority.

I suggest that this resulted in the alacrity with which the accumulation of bric-à-brac was attacked. The “lower” classes could be accused of displaying inherent poor taste through their choice of “barbarities” and those middle class people who displayed poor taste by cluttering their homes were letting the side down. In contrast, the upper classes demonstrated their superiority by having uncluttered houses and small amounts of expensive *objets d’art*.

Keen to distinguish themselves from those they regarded as beneath them, but also anxious to be respected by those above them in the Victorian social hierarchy, perhaps the middle class embraced “good taste” as a differentiator that was difficult to eliminate without education and wealth, even if the disadvantages of humble birth were overcome. A good example of this attitude is the suggestion by Alice Kellogg that people should separate their own tastes from those they put on display. Writing about the ideal parlour, she suggests: “Bric-a-brac and other decorations may be chosen for the enjoyment of those who come into this room, and not be an expression of the individual tastes of the family” (Kellogg 1905).

The upper and middle classes were aware that what distinguished them from the huge working population was now a matter of nuance. While it seems at first that a vast difference existed between those working people who cluttered their homes and crowded their mantelpieces with “trash and trumpery” and those upper middle class bric-à-brac hunters who toured the world collecting *objets d’art* that would be proudly displayed in their drawing rooms, the two behaviours are blurred.

In an unpublished paper presented at the recent *Victorian Paraphernalia* conference, Anne Anderson surveys those gentlemanly amateurs who had the time and money to go “antiquing,” collecting for pleasure (Anderson 2015). Their sometimes vast, often random accumulations of “old things” were at best admired and valued both aesthetically and monetarily. At worst they were regarded as harmlessly eccentric. As Anderson reveals, these objects, though individually usually very unlike those on working-class mantelpieces, there are striking similarities in the meanings attached to them. She quotes Walter A Dyer, who felt in 1910 that “a few old things...will add distinction to your home” (Anderson 2015, 2). The display of a handful of cheap figures of notables or mythological beings would also have added “distinction” to more humble homes. Anderson writes that “*bric-a-brac*, as a means to fashion the ‘self,’ constructed a persona through decor; the *amateur de curiosite* was also a *decoreur* or *metteur-en-scene*, and inventor of interiors” (Anderson 2015, 2). Figurines and other bibelots would have just as effectively invented the working-class interior.

Anderson quotes Teresa Barnett who believes that bric-à-brac exposes “the relationship between humans and their things, the emotional connections and investments, the bond between the living and the dead and the processing of mortality and loss.” They help us to understand the Victorian obsession with things as they commemorated ‘moments,’ ‘associations,’ ‘relationships’ and even ‘feeling’ (ibid). Paul Mullins, writing about “two miniature porcelain figurines depicting two characters seated on chamber pots...a curious motif with relatively bewildering meaning” suggests that: “it is tempting to simply ignore them as quaint but inconsequential whimsies. With a modest rethinking of material symbolism, we can begin to see these objects as penetrating, albeit oblique, observations on turn-of-the-century society.” He also considers that: “Like most late-19th century bric-à-brac, these curious chamber-pot figure were not mirrors of the real world as much as they were distorted symbols of what their possessors wished it to be (Mullins 2004, 95).

Gender

“What’s them things made of?” asked an old lady of an Italian image vendor. “Plaster of Parees, madam. Vera beautiful.” “I’ve heerd a good deal lately ’bout this Pasture of Paris, an’ I suppose it’s all the go. I guess I’ll take them two cupids for the settin’ room”

(Sausalito News, CA, March 25th 1886)

A casual, jocular combined misogyny and ageism is not only typical of its time but also comments wryly on the following of fashions that included mantelpiece ornaments.

Figure 191: Women and an image-seller. Detail of *The Image Boy*, 1854-1867. Abraham le Blond (see Appendix I, Figure A1.58, p 81).

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O597676/the-image-boy-baxter-process-print-le-blond-abraham/>

Godwin doesn't tell us much about the Plumtree Court household, but the objects on the mantelpiece help us to identify the input of an unseen, anonymous feminine influence (Ajmar 1999, 76). Although working-class women are portrayed by often anonymous but presumably male writers as gullible, foolish, wasteful, amusing and possessing poor taste, the objects they had the power to purchase and display on millions of mantelpieces tell us otherwise. For they were the buyers not only of spotted cats and parrots, but of reproductions of fine works of art, of

representations of playwrights and poets. They created “object worlds” (see page 427) with little money and in sometimes horrendous surroundings.

It is apparent that women were the principal customers of image-sellers (Figure 191). “As a general thing the bargaining is done by the fair sex in the absence of their liege lords,” wrote *The New York Times* in 1874 in an article entitled “The Image-Vender and his Wares.” It continued: “as they invariably shrink with horror from the prices asked, they are usually inveigled into giving in exchange for a bust of Clite or of Niobe, or a statuette of the Venus de Medicis, an amount of cast-off male clothing worth about four times the price demanded.”²¹⁶ The impression given by the *NY Times* piece is borne out by my investigations. Of the 29 illustrations that show both image-seller and customers, children appear in 17 (58%), and are the sole customers in 8 (27%). Of the 20 that show adult customers (70%), women are present in 16 (80%) and are sole customers in 6 (30%). Men are sole customers in only 2 illustrations (10%). The issue of gender within working-class homes and beyond was more complex than the overused “women’s sphere was that of the home” trope. The home was for many also a workplace. Women are always present in active roles. It is difficult to identify the status of these female roles from both illustrations and texts. They may appear in some cases to be subservient and in others to be reasonably equable. It could be argued that women held positions of importance that in the home workplace that included power over the domestic economy.

²¹⁶ See Appendix II, p 220.

The surroundings in the illustrations of interiors from both sides of the Atlantic show many decorative details that can be identified as “feminine.” Scenes with women present, with drapery, pictures, tablecloths, ornaments and displayed ceramics differ significantly from mostly-undecorated male-only environments, though it has to be said that the latter are mostly shared lodgings. The ability to obtain, by buying or exchange from street sellers, ornaments for the mantelpiece, gave women a power of consumption of non-utilitarian objects that was not overtaken until the rise of the low-cost department store and the catalogue reached levels where prices were low enough to enable almost universal involvement in these retail opportunities.

There are a few references to men purchasing images, but they are usually sentimental objects bought for a woman (e.g. a “kneeling Samuel...to be a joy and pleasure to his wife” and a “dimpled cheeked girl” as a surprise for his wife).²¹⁷ Because image-sellers were active in the streets, both sexes had equal access opportunities, but women, from servant girls though lodging-house landladies to respectable matrons were the principal purchasers of home decorations. They might use a breadwinner’s income to finance the purchase, however. It is not clear whether women purchased figures of what today we would regard as more “masculine” originals, such as sportsmen, criminals, politicians, military heroes, Napoleons and so on.

²¹⁷ See Appendix II, p 196 and Appendix II, p 254.

These apparently strong, powerful women, even if their power was limited to a few pence of disposable income that could be spent on what the *NY Times* called “superfluities,” discomfited many middle-class observers, as the sexism in newspaper and other accounts shows. If home was women’s domain, Godwin’s descriptions of filthy interiors were a subtle criticism of the women who ostensibly ruled over those hovels. Interestingly, Judy Attfield suggests that working-class women used a crowded but dust-free mantelpiece as evidence of their labour (Attfield 1995, 234).

“The plaster of Paris man finds his harvest”

The largest source of humour and scorn was reserved for women who traded their husband’s clothing for figurines. This activity suggests that if women did not have access to sufficient ready cash, they improvised, and were confident enough to do so. It may have been, of course, simply an overworked joke, though an internationally shared one, appearing particularly frequently in the US. I have already quoted Henry Mayhew’s account of a London costermonger in 1849 who declared that women often sold their husband’s clothing in order to buy china ornaments for their mantelpieces (Mayhew 1849, 368). With a mixture of tongue-in-cheek sarcasm and wry sexism, towards the end of the nineteenth century newspapers repeated the story of a wife exchanging her husband’s winter coat, or something similar, for plaster of Paris or ceramic images. The *Ohio Jackson Standard* in November 1873 included a column-filler:

*About this time the frugal housewife finds herself compelled to admit to her inquiring husband that she traded off his winter overcoat last July for the plaster image which Johnny broke.*²¹⁸

The Massachusetts *Cambridge Chronicle* advised in 1877 that because an image-seller was in town: “all the married men in Burlington wear their winter clothes and ulster overcoats to the store, and go to bed in them at night. It’s the only safe plan.”²¹⁹ When October arrived, the *Kansas Iola Register* enthused about the autumn colours that created an “enchanted scene” that “fills one with sublime emotion, and makes him imagine himself an angel, until a blast from the north suddenly wakes him from his daydream, only to realise with all its disagreeable force that his wife unfeelingly traded off his last winter’s ulster for a pair of plaster-of-paris images.”²²⁰ A few years later, a Christmas edition of *The Highland Weekly News* (OH) warned that “on Christmas morning the plaster-of-paris image man finds his harvest” and that the head of the family might find that his ulster, with its “fish-horn buttons on the back” had been replaced by “a plaster-of-paris cat in seven colours.”²²¹

Pants were also at risk, while the *Ashtabula Telegraph* (Ohio) reported that “next Monday night the ‘old men’s debating society’ will discuss the question. ‘Are motes more destructive of winter clothing than plaster of Paris image peddlers?’”²²² In

²¹⁸ See Appendix II, p 217.

²¹⁹ See Appendix II, p 225.

²²⁰ See Appendix II, p 224.

²²¹ See Appendix II, p 228.

²²² See Appendix II, pp 224 and 227.

New Zealand, the *Taranaki Herald* warned that “before a woman trades off her husband’s second-best suit for a seven cent plaster image, she should feel in the pockets for the letters she gave him to post last winter.”²²³ Amongst a score or so of examples, a “Philadelphia Dame” proudly showed her husband an “elegant Parian marble statuette” for which she exchanged his overcoat, according to the *Philadelphia Record* in 1889. When her shocked husband exclaims that his coat was worth \$25 she tells him that the seller had informed her that the statuette was worth \$40 and “came from the Vienna Exposition.” He duly points out that her prize is actually a plaster image made around the corner by an Italian and is worth ten cents.²²⁴

“[The average servant girl] will trade five old dresses for a quarter’s worth of plaster of paris images and think she has made a big bargain” claimed the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* in 1889, suggesting that “those who often wonder how these same peddlers live forget the servant girls and their foolishness.”²²⁵ Clothing was the most frequently pawned possession amongst the working class (Stallybrass 1998, 194). This, and their trade for ornaments implies that garments were often of exchangeable quality.

Landladies, chambers of horrors and mysterious animals

The Graphic decided in 1874 that the often-told story of image-sellers deliberately colliding with people to earn compensation for their “accidentally” destroyed wares

²²³ See Appendix II, p 230.

²²⁴ See Appendix II, p 249.

²²⁵ See Appendix II, p 250.

could not be entirely true, because it did not account for “the existence of those numerous plaster busts which ornament the fanlights of shabby-genteel lodging houses.”²²⁶ In an era when lodging houses were common, much is made of the poor taste and pomposity of landladies. William Dalton writes of “Mrs Rasper,” who was horrified by her tenant’s “handsome busts” of Shakespeare and Milton. “Why sir, the top of my sideboard made into a common image-board; I won’t have them two ugly old men’s heads...if I had let the room to a common foreign vagabond of an Italian image-boy it could not have been worse off” (Dalton 1849, 217).



Figure 192: *Aesthetics*, 1868. Charles Keene, *Punch or the London Charivari*, August 29th.

Punch makes fun of both landlady and tenant with a Charles Keene cartoon in which we can identify Bonaparte on horseback on one side of the mantelpiece and

²²⁶ See Appendix II, p 218.

probably a matching Wellington on the other. Fadsby, “ a martyr to the decorative art of the Nineteenth Century,’ begs his landlady, “Mrs Grabbit,” to “remove those chimney ornam—ugh!—those two—fictile abominations” from his room (Figure 192).

Landladies were not the only female target. A writer in the Oregon *Williamette Farmer* had a poor opinion of his neighbour’s taste that also describes the doubtful quality of some figures. We are told that she had “a perfect chamber of horrors in a collection of scriptural and historical personages in plaster, ranging from a praying Samuel whose legs, owing to an entirely original conception of the artist, seem to terminate at the knee, to an ‘eyestrian state’ as she calls it, of George Washington, who seems to have gotten on horseback with great difficulty, and to be in a very doubtful state as to what he is to do there, and how he is ever to get off.”²²⁷

Women were regarded as easy prey for the wiles of image-sellers. Following the sale for a tremendous price of a peachbloom vase in 1886 an image-seller offers “a Rockland woman” its twin: “a gombanion biece, only...larger” for a bargain \$2.50. The woman eventually purchases the piece, “besplashed with much red and yellow paint” for 35 cents “and a last year’s calico dress.”²²⁸ In 1870, the *Illustrated Sydney News* mentioned some examples of women’s “strange and noticeable taste...in the cheap chimney ornament line. Mysterious animals (shapen with equal fidelity to a horse or a pig) are banded, and spotted, and ringed, as surely never four-footed

²²⁷ See Appendix II, p 231.

²²⁸ See Appendix II, p 243.

beasts were before! Rare specimens of pink-nosed poodles, and of spotted tom-cats with ferocious whiskers and gooseberry eyes, predominate; but the popular fancy also inclines to members of the Highland brigade done in crockery, and to likenesses of Napoleon crossing the Alps on a jibbing horse, and pointing at nothing in the distance" (*Illustrated Sydney News* December 24th 1870).

Finally, the Montana *Philipsburg Mail*, in 1901, offered women of a certain age a mixed compliment when it compared a middle-aged woman to a plaster of Paris castle: "white and smooth and flawless and inane these castles were, until, a lighted candle being placed within them, the tiny windows became radiant and the small structure a thing of beauty."²²⁹

The love of art

Cheap plaster images...though coarse and rude, are not altogether unserviceable in developing a love of art among the people

(Alger, 1889)

John Bedford, writing in 1964, mistakenly but understandably claimed working-class ignorance of things classical:

Somewhere about the beginning of the Victorian era there was a change of spirit. The enormously increased demand for ornaments from an expanding population with increased spending power set up a need for something cheaper, and therefore simpler to make, less sophisticated than the

²²⁹ See Appendix II, p 272.

imitations of porcelain—who among this new public had ever heard of Apollo or Ceres? All these factors combined to produce a new and vigorous kind of folk art—except that it had a strong flavour of the new urban populations rather than the peasant countryside

(Bedford 1964, 43)

Like many, Bedford was apparently not aware of plaster of Paris images, which would have already have been gracing the mantelpieces of the “modestly endowed” by the start of Victoria’s reign. He was wrong in claiming that, early in the nineteenth century, although there was “an expanding population with increased spending power” — “who among this new public had ever heard of Apollo or Ceres?” The expanding population of Sydney, Australia, had indeed heard of Ceres, for in 1847 a minor drama took place in Church Hill, when Mary Ann Collins, “a person of singularly repulsive exterior” stole a chimney ornament of the goddess Ceres, worth two shillings (a considerable sum) in order, she told the court, to defend herself against “a man wot wor a taking on liberties with her.” It is instructive that a figurine of Ceres harvesting wheat sheaves should be for sale in Mrs O’Brien’s shop in the Rocks area of early Sydney, which, although the commercial hub of the growing city, nevertheless had a doubtful reputation.²³⁰

Leigh Hunt, writing in 1834, called the cargo of an “image boy” a “moving miniature sculpture gallery” that offered “new treasure of old art” that was “accessible to eye and pocket.”²³¹ It is important to underline Alan Gowans’ contention that “what we

²³⁰ See Appendix II, p 189.

²³¹ See Appendix II, p 173.

call ‘art’ today is a different kind of activity from what we call historic arts” (Gowans 1981, 16-17). So Godwin’s claim that the working classes loved “art” and the claim that image sellers were educating their customers in “art” referred not only to the objects that hung on gallery walls but also to a different set of principles. Gowans lists them as “substitute imagery,” “illustration,” “beautification” and “persuasion/conviction” as well as “artistic expression” (Gowans 1981, 17-18). These aspects of material culture could be seen in the 1851 Great Exhibition, but are also well represented by the objects on the Plumtree Court mantelpiece, as well as the trays on the heads on nineteenth century image sellers in New York and Boston and the crates of Staffordshire pottery figures in the holds of ships heading for Australia.

An anonymous writer in the January 1841 edition of *The Art Union* asserted that:

“There are, to be sure, individuals who would prefer the contents of the show-board of an itinerant image vender [sic] to the frieze of the Parthenon; but such a circumstance will not prove the inferiority of the one description of art, and the superiority of the other” (Anon 1841, 10). “C.B.A.” was still chewing over the subject of “art” and the common man in an 1870 edition of George Godwin’s magazine *The Builder*, some 15 years after the editor’s visit to Plumtree Court:

It will surely then be seen that the art of common things is a matter of importance and interest, and the chimney ornaments on the chimney shelf of a working man’s room, and the pictures hung round the walls of it, may come to be tests of his educational advancement; and perhaps the Government inspector himself may actually find out what sort of education the workman’s family of sons and daughters are receiving by a simple inspection of the

chimney ornaments and pictures in his possession, and even get in time and idea of art himself

(C.B.A. 1870, 402)

Godwin had called the objects on the Plumtree Court mantelpiece “barbarities” in 1856, and C.B.A.’s opinion of working-class ornaments was no more positive a decade later, but then neither was his appreciation of more costly creations:

If among the very worst of these trumpery ‘ornaments’ we take the vilest and the most worthless and the cheapest—say a small earthenware figure of a man and dog, the man with a daub of red, and the dog with a daub of blue, and compare with a very expensive modern line engraving of a like subject—I say it would puzzle the most expert of art analysts or art critics to determine with accuracy which of the twain is the emptiest and the most artistically worthless. A real and practical change in art and in the practice of it will certainly come about when the time has come for even the commencement of a new order of things on the chimney-shelf and walls of a common room!

(C.B.A. 1870, 403)

A point worth exploring is that nineteenth century working class people were “literate.” Carl Moritz had noted, in the late eighteenth century, that: “the common people of England read their English authors.” Jonathan Rose, who quoted Moritz, briefly surveys working-class cultural literacy in the nineteenth century, suggesting that “autodidact culture flourished” (Rose 2001, 189). They may not have written in ways that matched the output of their middle-class contemporaries, but they nevertheless appear to have been familiar with Shakespeare, Milton, Walter Scott,

Homer and other literary luminaries, and to recognise a varied cast of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, and wished to have them on their mantelpieces. The possession of a miniature bust of Homer, Milton or Shakespeare could display a wish to absorb their intellectual output as if by osmosis. It could also indicate that their owners had read their readily-available works, often at very little cost. Individual Shakespeare plays could be purchased for a halfpenny in 1864, and in 1868 Thomas Wright wrote that “the books necessary for a complete course of self education can be obtained for a few shillings. ‘Shakespeare’s Complete Works’ are advertised for sale for one shilling” (Murphy 2008, 4-5).

In the cross-section of a tenement depicted in Figure 193 the only identified room in the building is a “Reading Room.” In this context this might at first seem surprising. After all, the illustration is supposedly of poor living conditions. However the objects that the street sellers of “images” sold, and which working class people desired, bought and displayed in their homes suggest strongly that there was more awareness of Shakespeare, Milton and Venuses than we tend to assume from our twenty-first century vantage point.

The working classes, in their delight in the gaudy parrots and colourful figures, would probably not have realised that the middling and upper classes saw the miniature Homers and plaster of Paris goddesses as improving both the workers’ appreciation of beauty but also their morals, but Godwin was perhaps right in suggesting that the mantelpiece filled with “barbarities” offered a “bridge” between the classes. Whether anyone crossed that bridge is debatable. The stubborn survival

of cats and parrots and sentimental little boys from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries, and the enduring popularity of Bonaparte, suggests that the working classes retained and retain their own views as to what was/is “art”, as displayed in the galleries balanced on the heads of “image boys”.

Alan Rauch suggests that “literacy, at whatever level of accomplishment, is not a prerequisite for making sense of or telling stories about figurines” and goes on to consider these objects might themselves be “knowledge texts” that use the relatively inexpensive media of pottery or plaster of Paris as an alternative to more costly printed paper (Rauch 2013).

To suggest, as Glassie does, that the “majority” during the nineteenth century “were non-literate and...they did not write” (Glassie 1976, 8) is perhaps misleading. I think he means that they did not write about their lives, rather than they were illiterate. A few did write of course, and their informal records, mostly letters, diaries and journals, are being researched by a small number of archive-based programmes such as the “Writing Lives” project at Liverpool John Moores University (www.writinglives.org). This project, itself based on the work of John Burnett in the 1980s, perhaps demonstrates lack of interest in this area until very recently in that as of June 2015 one cannot yet carry out a keyword search of this collected material, which makes it at present an unwieldy source.

Figure 193: Cross-section of New York tenement (Detail). In this section a “Reading Room” is identified.

<http://www.maggieblanck.com/NewYork/Leslie1865.html>

Many children could read. A “ragged school” had been established in Plumtree Court in 1847 (*London City Press*, 25th September 1858), and Thomas Archer describes another ragged school in one of the most deprived areas of London, only a stone’s throw from Plumtree Court, “filled up-stairs and down with children” with a hundred scholars who were lent books to take home to read (Archer 1865, 67). This was repeated many times in industrialising countries. Eduard Charton stresses how important the itinerant image seller has been in educating the public, and he points out that although the objects that are present in working-class homes are perhaps not of the highest standard, they nevertheless reflect “a marked upward movement in the intellectual education of many” (Charton 1850, 589).

There were very many opportunities in the nineteenth century, especially in its second half, for interacting with the distant past and the changing present. There were a number of exhibitions through which “the working man might be usefully educated in his leisure time” (Greenwood 1888 cited in Snape 2010, 23). London working people could have attended the *North London Working Classes Industrial Exhibition* (1864) or the *Workmen’s Exhibition* held in 1888 at the People’s Palace for East London in Mile End Road, which featured 400 exhibits representing seventy trades. The archaeologist Flinders Petrie wrote in 1901 that “some workmen would spend their whole dinner hour” at his exhibition at University College London of material from the excavation of Abydos (Thornton 2015).

An example of the sort of institution in which working-class people could participate was the Ancoats Art Museum. In 1877, in the heart of the densely-populated

Manchester industrial suburb, Thomas Horsfall opened an Art Museum, created to “alleviate the miserable dullness and emptiness of the life lived by a very large proportion of the inhabitants of Manchester.”²³² Stuart Eagles writes: “Art, extended to the poorest members of the community, became a social mission” (Eagles 2009). The museum, which displayed painting, sculpture, architecture and domestic arts, included a “Model Workman’s Room” and a “Model Dwelling’s Sitting Room.” Eagles describes Ancoats as “cramped back-to-back jerry-built housing, with a densely-packed, largely immigrant population all competing for a gasp of the industrially-polluted air that swirled around the cotton mills, iron foundries, coal wharves and slaughter houses, squeezing through the tight alleyways and narrow canals...the Art Museum at Ancoats stood as a cultural beacon on the edge of the dirtiest, dreariest neighbourhood.” Interestingly, Thomas Horsfall thought that in the mid century, class divisions were less marked (Ibid).

The then editor of *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, S. S. Conant, was concerned that the US should follow Europe in having public galleries of art “as in Paris, Berlin, Munich and London with free access.” He wrote in 1876 that “there is many a working-man in Paris who knows more about pictures and statues than the majority of cultivated people in this country...enter the galleries of Paris, of Munich, or Dresden, on a holiday, and you will find hundreds of people belonging to the working classes, men, women, and children, feasting their eyes on the treasures of art, and filling their minds with love for the beautiful” (Conant 1876, 693). Powers’ *Greek Slave* caused a “commotion” amongst people S.S. Conant accused in 1876 of

²³² Thomas Horsfall (1844-1932) was a friend of John Ruskin and came from a wealthy Manchester cotton family.

lacking “culture,” although he hoped that “prejudices like these, the fruit of ignorance, are happily dying out” (Conant 1876, 693).

Image-sellers were still educating the public at the beginning of the twentieth century:

They know more about the masterpieces of sculpture than do many of the self-satisfied art critics, and, when one comes to think of it, is not a community greatly benefited by their presence? In the pursuance of their labor they really do more to improve the general taste, to place copies of known sculpture within the reach of all, and to familiarize the public with what is good, than any school (which only a few can attend), then any gallery (which the working classes seldom visit), or any other institution in the country

(*The Sunday Journal*, January 25th 1903) Indianapolis

Calboli quoted French and Italian intellectuals who considered that image-sellers nurtured people’s passion for art:

M. Carina, cité par Giannini a pu dire avec raison que “la vente des stucchini a contribué dans une large à la diffusion de l’art.” M. Fournel dans son livre: ce qu’on voit dans les rues de Paris dit que “les marchands de statuettes en plâtre répandent et entretiennent dans le peuple le sentiment des arts”²³³

(Calboli 1909, 117)

²³³ Madame Carina, cited by Giannini, could rightly say that “the sale of stucchini has contributed significantly to the dissemination of art.” Monsieur Fournel in his book: *Ce Qu’on Voit Dans les Rues de Paris* wrote that “plaster statuette sellers spread amongst the people and nurture their passion for art.” (my translation)

Superstition

Miniatures were and are often displayed at the heart of the home, above or near the hearth, a location vulnerable to the ingress of evil spirits and 'Old Nick' himself. In medieval times the hearth was often protected by magical graffiti. The popularity of miniatures such as Staffordshire dogs, always wide-eyed, alert and awake on the mantelpiece, watching over both hearth and living room, could be evidence of a subconscious wish to guard this risky area. In a number of cases miniatures have been found amongst objects hidden in walls, and their occurrence in less obvious places, such as a battlefield, could indicate that they were carried as charms.

The chimney is an always-open portal to the outside world, with the fireplace at its base. The mantelpiece might therefore be associated, even unconsciously, with the folk memory and superstition that has been associated with the hearth since at least medieval times: for example Welsh and Manx fairies were rumoured to take over the fire once the family had gone to bed (Rhys 1994, 2). Outside in many a garden stands a vanguard of small figures, gnomes, which "[hark] back to the dark fairy-tale forests of Europe" (Pendle 2016) and are ready to scare away any malevolent spirits. But should an invader reach the chimney and arrive in the hearth, they then face a posse of dogs, small humans, lions, frogs or whatever, all wide-eyed and alert, guarding the entrance into the vulnerable world of the household. They may have acted as apotropaic devices. There is a suggestion in Jay Loomings' blog that there might be a connection between Staffordshire dogs and hobgoblins (Loomings 2013). These objects, if small enough, could also be carried as charms. Others might be the

basis of small, disparate collections that might be regarded as ‘shrines’ (which might be another explanation of their continued popularity in the face of criticism of clutter and *bric-à-brac*).

Miniature tripod cauldrons offer a curious example. Already mostly obsolete in the nineteenth century, when few urban houses had a fireplace big enough to allow the installation of a fire crane, and when many homes possessed small ranges and others engaged in communal cooking, the tripod cauldron, or at least its miniature version, continued to play a seemingly important role. Multiple examples are listed in the English Portable Antiquities database (2,361 records in September 2016). As unstratified finds grubbed up by metal detectorists those in the PAS database are dated pretty much by guesswork, but it is significant that they occurred on nineteenth century mantelpieces (Figure 194) and are still collected today (Figure 195), at least 200 years after they were last in common use (*see also* Figure 46).



Figure 194: Miniature cauldron on “Victorian” mantelpiece, Weston-super-Mare museum. Photograph, the author.



Figure 195: Examples of miniature cauldrons, collection of the author. Scale in cm.

Are they examples of nostalgia? Or sentimentality? Or could it be an unconscious association with magic and superstition? Neela Banerjee notes that on a wiccan mantelpiece are: “two candles, a tiny cauldron, four stones to represent the elements of nature and a small amethyst representing her spirit” (Banerjee 2007). I’m not suggesting that people (other than wiccans perhaps) consciously create these collections of objects as shrines, just as I don’t think that garden gnomes are bought deliberately to repel evil spirits. But perhaps there is a sort of material folk memory present in these objects. For example, the writer of the “Copper and Wood” blog acquired a Staffordshire dog figurine, which she placed on her hearth along with a plastic miniature dinosaur (Figure 196). “No-one will steal my fire now!” she blogged sharing a sentiment that would be understood by someone from the Neolithic (Anon 2013).

Figure 196: “No one will steal my fire now!” 2013, *Copper and Wood* blog 31st March 2013..

The *Alasitas* fair in La Paz, Bolivia, is a celebration of the magical power of miniaturisation. By buying miniature objects, people believe that they can influence their futures. A miniature house will lead to the purchase of a full-scale home. Miniature luggage will lead to travel. Miniature money will result in the real thing. The objects are blessed either by a catholic priest or an indigenous shaman. Miniature objects sold at the fair include representations of mobile phones, televisions, vehicles, cameras, food and building materials. The miniatures are then gifted to those in need of whatever they represent, hence the popularity of marriage certificates, miniature babies and, ironically, divorce papers.

It seems that some miniature objects possess a sort of magic memory, or memory of magic, but on that subject I should share some appropriate words from a Terry

Pratchett children's novel: "Magic is just a way of saying 'I don't know'" (Pratchett 2008, 175).

Eroticism

On the coping of the wall, an image-seller had set out his wares. They were a dream of fair women, classic and modern. The solemn majesty of the great Venus was contrasted with Phryne hiding her eyes in a spasm of modesty.²³⁴ Clytie, with the perfect fall of her shoulders, rising from the lily leaves that fold back as if unwilling to hide so much beauty, stood droopingly beside the proud nakedness of Falguiere's Diana.²³⁵ The boy who presided over this gallery of loveliness— a meagre Italian, his facing nipped with frost—stood a hunched up, wretched figure, his eyes questioning the passers-by

(*St Paul Globe* 25th September 1902)

Classical themes added a subtle eroticism to the stock in trade of image sellers.

While ceramic figures, usually sculpted by the anonymous designers of workaday potteries, remained relatively crude (see Figure 154), their plaster of Paris competition based its models on Greek and Roman originals (Figure 155).

Adhering to the nineteenth century's double standards, a respectable working-class mantelpiece could now display any number of naked or semi-robed figures. That this disturbed some was indicated by the 1827 arrest by a "street keeper" of an Italian in

²³⁴ In 4th century BC Greece, Phryne was a famous courtesan, not known for her modesty. Figurines of her were usually of a naked woman, modestly shielding her eyes.

²³⁵ Falguiere's 1882/1891 statues of a nude *Diana* were much criticised. One commentator wrote that she was too plump, was "not Nudity but Nakedness" and the statues were merely "clever."

the City of London for offering for sale a sleeping Venus. The *Examiner* published a poem that poked fun at a “sad Macaroni” called “Giannone:”

From indecency screen us—

Go, shut up that Venus;

*She hasn't a rag to put on!*²³⁶

A street-keeper in Walbrook had charged Andrea Giannone with offering “that there image for sale” — a sleeping Venus which the street-keeper thought to be “indecent, not to say indelicate.” The Chief Clerk supposed that “persons of the street keeper’s delicacy will shortly seize our Apollo Belvedere” (a full-size cast of which had been placed in the Egyptian Hall by the “Corporation Committee of Taste”) “and break it to pieces, to prove the superior purity of their ideas.” The Italian did not seem to understand English and simply laughed. The Lord Mayor told him that it was “no laughing matter” but let him go, advising him that if he was caught again he would be punished. The Italian was advised that he must not come again into the city unless he put “petticoats on his figures” because “all the taste is on the other side of Temple Bar, where he must keep.” The Italian “went away laughing.”

The heathenish wench may be pretty;

But unless she thinks best

To have herself drest,

Hang me if she comes in the City.

(*The Examiner*, November 4th 1827)

It is easy to visualise the scandalised street-keeper, the amusement in the courtroom, the mystified Italian laughing at the whole affair and the smile on the

²³⁶ See Appendix II, p 166.

official's face when he remarked that good taste could only be found the other side of Temple Bar, then the gateway to the City of London. We can also glimpse the double standards of the time, which approved of nudity (especially of the female form) in art but were scandalised by the exposure of more than an ankle.

The popularity of statuettes of subjects such as the Farnese Hercules, the Apollo Belvedere and Powers' Greek Slave sometimes caused offence. Statuettes of Powers' nude became popular, much to the horror of some of the more sensitive. In 1857 two image-sellers were arrested in Mobile, Texas, for offering statuettes of the sculpture, because they were considered to be "immoral and indecent." While the *Daily Dispatch* of Richmond VA considered that "the good people of Mobile seem disposed to carry their modesty a little too far" the *Burlington Free Press* considered the statue to be "an incendiary document" (perhaps with tongue in cheek).²³⁷ Nevertheless the image-sellers' stock in trade often included both male and female nudes, and indeed some commentators regarded classical works to be valuable in improving education and taste.

There was likely a thriving trade in erotic, bawdy and pornographic images, though this was rarely recorded and few examples, if any, have survived. A case recorded in London in 1845 expressed sympathy with a "luckless Italian Image seller" who had been entrapped into showing an agent of the Vice Society some pornographic bas-reliefs. These were "of so loose and libidinous a description that the Vice Society's man, in a fit of virtuous disgust, seized his whole stock and gave him in charge to the

²³⁷ See Appendix II, p 204.

police.” Dominique Barsatti, described as “an Italian itinerant vender of plaster casts”, had a box of “fancy medallions”. These were described to Alderman Hunter at the Guildhall as having “no pretensions to be of a classical nature, but were copies after some of the vilest French pictures for illustrating infamous books.” The unfortunate Barsatti claimed he’d brought them with him for a gentleman he’d expected to meet and hadn’t brought them out until asked for them by the stooge, but this was rejected by the court, and he was sentenced to a month’s imprisonment. A significant detail that emerged from this case was that the offending objects were manufactured in Cow Cross, near the southern end of Farringdon Street, not far from Plumtree Court. *The Satirist or Censor of the Times* wrote that “it is, as we view it, especially hateful to see men entrapped into an offence against the laws. The immorality of this practice is hardly better than the other kind of immorality it seeks to suppress.”²³⁸

“An interesting contribution to the history of ideas comes from a mass of broken, late 19th century clay pipes and porcelain figure fragments recently recovered from near the City Custom House” wrote Geoff Egan in 1996. “These proved to be imported pornography in the round, seized and smashed by the Customs authorities under legislation introduced in 1857. Although ceramics can be made smaller, it is very difficult indeed to get them to disappear altogether...these finds may be the only specific evidence available for just what, in ceramics, was considered too outrageous for Victorian England” (Egan 1996). It is fascinating that these colourful

²³⁸ See Appendix II, p 189.

objects subsequently vanished from the Museum of London, a comment on prevailing attitudes to this type of material (Jeffries 2012 pers comm).

There was a more acceptable face of eroticism that also involved image-sellers, whose stock often included miniature versions of nude or semi-naked female and male statues. Henry James, a great describer and critic of material culture, wrote rather stiffly of these figures “so undressed, yet so refined, in sugar-white alabaster, exposed under little glass covers in such American homes as could bring themselves to think such things right” (James 1903, 114).

A writer in the *New York Times* in 1853 found that his pair of soldiers, a Huguenot and a Catholic, bought from an Italian image man for a dollar each, was “eclipsed” by his roommate’s acquisition of a presumably more erotic *Nymph and Satyr* that looked “so exceedingly expensive.”²³⁹ It is telling that *NY Times* readers would understand the contrast between the humdrum soldiers and the statuette of the entwined and naked demigods, the possession of which could be excused by the fact that they appeared expensive.

²³⁹ See Appendix II, p 198.

Such legs as these

Figure 197: *A Connoisseur!* 1831. Henry Heath. British Museum

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3025483&partId=1&searchText=%22Henry+Heath%22&page=2

Another erotic focus was on a single woman, Madame Vestris (see *The Archaeology of a Ballad*, p 262). While there were many miniatures made of her, in both ceramics and plaster of Paris, there was also a minor trade in casts of her famous legs, which she often showed off to her advantage.²⁴⁰ Sadly, like most plaster of Paris originals, none of these casts have survived.

²⁴⁰ "...Madame Vestris] was to be seen in every form of chimney ornament, placard, and print..." (*Empire* November 11th, 1856).

An 1831 print by Henry Heath (Figure 197) suggests that her legs were life-sized, so not appropriate for this study, but the Pennsylvania *Lancaster Daily Intelligencer* reported in 1882 that her foot: “the symmetry of which was said to be unparalleled...had been sculpted and plaster casts were on sale by Italian image boys in the streets.”²⁴¹ It is remarkable that Vestris’s allure was still surviving some 50 years after the peak of her career, and 25 years after her death. Heath’s caricature of *A Connoisseur!* sketches the (imagined?) interior of a workshop, that of James Papera, who in February 1831 charged one his workers, Thomas Papera, with stealing a number of casts that included one of Madame Vestris’ legs. Heath’s scurrilous caricature includes a goat, presumably referring to the expression “old goat,” and the words “Beautiful! beautiful! no doubt equal to the Originals, but the Pair would be too much for me.—I wish some kind friend would divide them with me” and the verse:

*Oh Cunning P.— thou’rt perfect Master,
Of taking forms in Paris Plaister:
And woe unto the Man betide,
Who would such legs as these divide!
Sweet M—d—m V—would soon discover,
If you sold one without the Other!*

(Heath 1831)

²⁴¹ See Appendix II, p 231.

Bollards – a mystery?

One of the most common repeated elements of the illustrations of image sellers is the bollard, a prosaic piece of street furniture often made, during the nineteenth century, using a redundant cannon with a cannon ball hammered into its mouth.²⁴²

A bollard also appears on the cover of the ballad *Buy Image!* (Figure 127) and *Buy My Images* (Figure 139). The bollards are usually depicted as vertical, but some lean to one side (see *The Fall of Napoleon*, Figure 167).

I haven't carried out a large-scale survey, but at first glance bollards appear more frequently in illustrations of image-sellers than other "street cries" and cartoons/caricatures. It may be that these innocent-looking objects are phallic symbols.

A bollard at a jaunty, definitely phallic angle featured on several tongue-in-cheek nineteenth century Valentine cards (e.g. Figure 198. The verse reads: *With knowing eye and betting book,/Waiting some poor flat to hook,/In vain your tackle you display,/I shall not nibble, sir, today.*). A bollard has been identified as a phallic symbol in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Found* (1854) (Bullen 1998, 63). Along with Paul Pry's phallic umbrella and the brooms of the broom seller this may be another indication of the peculiar sexuality of the nineteenth century, which at its outset

²⁴² See Appendix I: Figures A1.6, p 9; A1.7, p 10; A1.21, p 27; A1.23, p 29; A1.31, p 37; A1.33, p 40; A1.36, p 43; A1.38.p 46; A1.45, p 58; A1.48, p 63; A1.58, p 76; A1.91, p 114.

would allow Rowlandson to produce cartoons that were robustly pornographic as well as commenting on the double-standards and hypocrisy of his times.

Figure 198: Nineteenth century Valentine card, c1850.

<http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-victorian-comic-valentine-of-bookmaker-circa-1850-5777210.html>

Figures of fun

Joseph Pollet exhibited *Une Heur de la Nuit* at the Paris Salon in 1848.²⁴³ The nude was immediately popular, enough to become one of the figures offered by image-sellers. In his 1852 “humorous illustration” (Figure 199) John Leech depicts an image-seller with two of these figures on his board. He holds out an *Apollo Belvedere*, a work that has been described as “the highest ideal of art” (Vatican Museums web site). Nevertheless, the “flunkey” knows better.



Figure 199: *Different People have Different Opinions*, John Leech, 1852 (Punch) Flunkey. “Apollo? Hah! I dessay it’s very cheap, but it ain’t my ideer of a good figger!”

Throughout the period of this study, woven through the network that I am untangling, is a thread of humour. When surveying humour of the past it is

²⁴³ Ironically the exhibited version was a plaster model.

important to remember that old adage “you had to be there.” What was amusing nearly 200 years ago reflected contemporary *mores*. To modern tastes some nineteenth-century humour could appear cruel, bigoted, racist, demeaning and at best insulting. This was a period when a defendant in a court case could be described as “of loose character” when another was identified as “notorious for freedom in the use of her tongue (*The Queenslander* February 27th 1869), and when Italians were routinely called “Dagos” in the press.²⁴⁴ Some of the humour is crass, some of it gentle, and some is still capable of making me, at least, laugh. The humour often displays what to modern tastes are cruelty, racism, misogyny and xenophobia. A few of the writers are still known today, Jerome K Jerome and Mark Twain being the most obvious examples. However most are anonymous.

Nevertheless, humour surrounding attitudes to bric-à-brac, working-class tastes in ornament and the activities of the image-sellers and those who bought their wares shed light on another neglected corner of nineteenth-century life – what made people laugh, or at least smile.

²⁴⁴ See Appendix II, pp 240, 241, 246, 264, 281, 285.



Figure 200: *The Image Seller*, 1843. *Punch or the London Charivari*.

The magazine *Punch, or The London Charivari* made use of “images” and their Italian vendors as a source of satirical metaphor throughout the nineteenth century. *Punch* stirred together a mixture of noisy boys who could be relied on to get into mischief, the figurines of politicians, nobility and royalty, as well as the notorious and criminal, the fragility of both plaster of Paris and ceramic “images” with snobbery and pomposity. The figures on image-sellers’ trays could be replaced with caricatures of whoever was in the news at the time. In its relentless pursuit of Lord Brougham, *Punch* used image-sellers at least twice (Figure 200 and Figure 201). Mantelpieces of the ignorant middle classes and of the over-aspiring working classes, who sometimes threatened to get above their station in life, could be populated with images that underlined poor taste or gullibility. Although intending to amuse, the

anonymous writers and artists do sometimes provide some corroborating evidence as to the objects displayed on Victorian mantelpieces.



Figure 201: Henry Brougham squirting muddy water at Pope Pius IX, 1848. *Punch or the London Charivari*.

The funny side of bric-à-brac

LIST OF ENGRAVINGS AND WORKS OF ART FOR DISTRIBUTION.

1. A plaster-cast of a Cat, with an oscillating head.
2. Four loose Encyclopædia Plates: consisting of Optics, plate 2; Anatomy; Arts, Fine; and Electro-Magnetism.
3. An exquisite painting, in the *al-fresco* pawn-brokers' school, of black-and-white Spaniels—two lying down and one standing up.
4. Similar group of two standing up and one lying down.
5. Plaster-cast—a Poll Parrot, coloured from life.






Figure 202: Cat with oscillating head (“nodder”) and Poll Parrot, “coloured from life”. *Punch or the London Charivari*, Vol 2 p110.

Casting a sidelong look at the pretensions of the art market, *Punch* announced that on April 1st 1884, there was to be a lottery (tickets costing 1d) held by the “Umbrella

Art-Union” consisting of “the print-umbrella proprietors...and cheap image-men – the picture-dealers and sculptors of the million.” (Anon 1844b, 110). Amongst the works of art were “A plaster-cast of a Cat, with an oscillating head” (Figure 202), one of “a Poll Parrot, coloured from life” and “a Bough-pot: painted (a great way) after nature.”²⁴⁵ Under the heading “Overdoing it” *The Sheffield Independent* reported the case of an unfortunate maid who, thinking her mistress’s ornaments could do with cleaning, soaked them in a bucket of water, only to find that they dissolved.²⁴⁶ Nearly a century later, *The Star* joked: “Mrs bric-a-brac: ‘Good gracious, Bridget, how could you have broken that precious vase? Why, do you know, it was four hundred years old.’ Bridget (calmly): ‘Oh, if it was an ould thing like that, yez can take it out av me nixt week’s wages’” (*The Star*, January 14th 1902).



Shocking!

*Mrs B. (lately bitten). “Fond
o’Bric-a-Brac! Ao—h! Aw—f’ly.
Brown says I’m becoming quite
an atheist!!”*

*Philistine Visitor (under his
breath). Gee-acious Heavens!!”*

Figure 203: Shocking! 1882. Charles Keene (Punch).

²⁴⁵ A “bough pot” was an alternative spelling for “bow pot.” A pot for holding a bunch of flowers (a bough). These were often represented in plaster of Paris or earthenware, and examples can be seen in several illustrations in Appendix I (A1.3, A1.8, A1.22, A1.27, A1.39, A1.54).

²⁴⁶ See Appendix II, p 167.

The merry mantelpiece: a “museum in miniature”

In “the Museum of Mr Spinkey” (in his front parlour in Canonbury Road) *Punch* found a “Model of a Swiss Chalet, in plaster of Paris. This exquisite work of art was purchased of a talented foreigner, who walks about at evening with a whole village on his head” (Anon 1843a, 122).



Figure 204: A bust of Shakespeare, or perhaps Milton, 1843. *Punch or the London Charivari*, Vol 2 p 152.

Punch explores Mr. Snook’s back parlour for “works of art” (Figure 204) and discovers a “museum in miniature” on which stands “a small white figure, purchased by Mr. Snooks of an Italian artist who passed through Pentonville on his way from Genoa; and it is said by Mr. Snooks himself to represent either Milton or Shakspeare; but from the imperfect account given of it by the foreign vendor, the point has never been settled”(Anon 1842b, 152-3). At the time, Pentonville, once a comfortable suburb on the edge of London, was heading rapidly downhill, and *Punch*’s fictional Mr. Snooks was probably a resident of one of lodgings created by

sub-dividing its larger dwellings. His plaster bust, which from the illustration appears to be of Shakespeare (not the contemporary spelling), was obviously bought from an Italian image-seller. The confusion over whether it was Shakespeare or Milton is more likely to be Mr. Snooks', who is no doubt also guilty of over-egging the status of the "artist" from Genoa, though there is a strong likelihood that many image-sellers took advantage of the credulity of their less educated or more pompous customers.

We learn of a headless plaster of Paris cat on a chimney-piece in Saffron Hill (Figure 205), the seat of "Fantail Joe," who, with his "insinivating [sic] manner and knowledge of the noble science of self-defence" had "spent most of his life in collecting dust from all sorts of localities" and had "realised a splendid collection of rubbish."

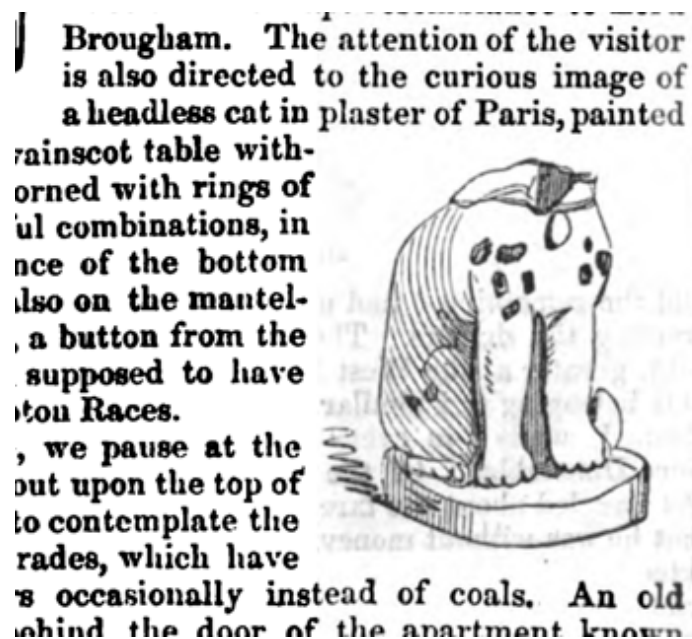


Figure 205: "The curious image of headless cat, painted green and red" 1842 *Punch or the London Charivari*, Vol 2, 132.

Economy

Working-class people, like middle-class people, furnished homes with care and with an eye to display. Indeed, working-class wealth was often put into items that could be displayed and could shore up the family's respectability. These included Sunday best clothing and elaborate funerals, but also included home decorations, such as figurines that were display displayed on the mantelpiece (which might cycle in a lot of pawnshops, weekly or in times of difficulty)

(Steinbach 2012, 2)

It was necessary that Susie Steinbach's working-class people were active consumers of material culture both utilitarian and purely decorative for the 'system': the mass of little shops, the pawn shops, the black market, the hawkers, the street markets, thieves, the Italian Boys, the makers of cheap china, the manufacturers of "toys", all supported and were supported by a working-class economy. The livelihoods of the image-sellers, as mentioned above, depended on the sales of low-priced plaster of Paris and earthenware figurines and busts, to people with not much money. "At the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century, the urban working class entered the world of consumption beyond the necessities" (Steinbach 2012, 108). Steinbach echoes a familiar refrain, one perhaps encouraged by Paul Johnson's earlier paper on working-class consumption, which similarly focused on the late Victorians (Johnson 1988). But from the activities of image-sellers it is apparent that the working classes had long had enough disposable income to enable the purchase of at least a few possessions that were unnecessary.

Figure 206 shows that interest in “images” and “image-sellers” as shown by stories in newspapers and other media was high in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Illustrations had begun appearing at the end of the eighteenth century. The graph is skewed by the absence of a significant number of undated illustrations, especially postcards, which appeared at the end of the century and the beginning of the twentieth and which indicate a burst of revived activity and interest, at least in France. The increase in newspaper coverage may be the result of increased circulations rather than reflecting the amount of image selling activity. However it does indicate the continuity of the trade.

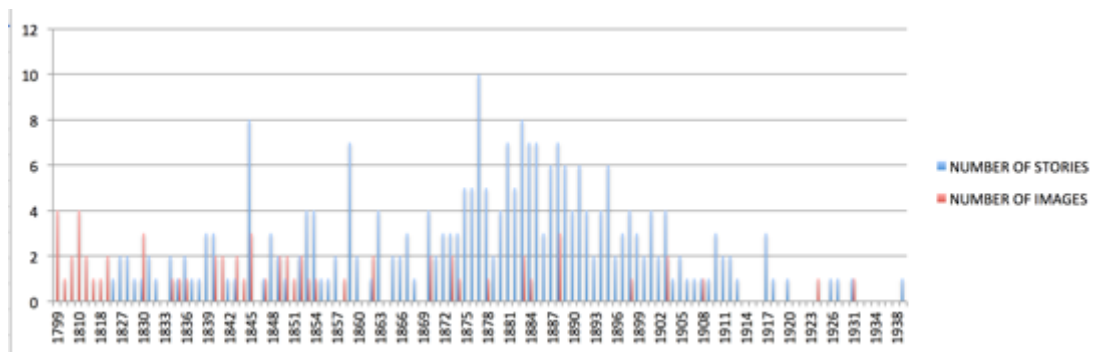


Figure 206: Graph showing frequency of newspaper and other mentions of “images” (blue bars) and of illustrations of image sellers (red bars), 1799 to 1938 (see Appendix I). The graph omits 47 undated illustrations.

The spread of activity shown in Figure 206 argues against those writers who at various times predicted the demise of “images.” The *Memphis Daily Appeal* had noted the passing of “the Italian plaster image makers” in 1867, putting their extinction down to “the cheapness of engravings.”²⁴⁷ *The Graphic* wrote in 1874

²⁴⁷ See Appendix II, p 211.

that: “It is seldom now that we see about the streets that familiar figure of our youthful days, the Italian image seller, with his plaintive cry “Buy my images.”²⁴⁸ In the same year *The New York Times* uses almost the same words: “One seldom sees in New-York – the more’s the pity – the familiar figure to Londoners of the Italian image man.”²⁴⁹ Other stories however told of new arrivals from Italy, new image-sellers in town, new workshops being set up and of thriving businesses.²⁵⁰ That Paulucci di Calboli published his book *Larmes et Sourires de L’émigration Italienne* (Tears and Smiles of Italian Emigration) which exposed the abuse of young image-sellers in France, as late as 1909, implies that the trade was still significant, at least in that country (Calboli 1909). It appears that there was a steady demand for “images” amongst working-class people throughout the nineteenth century. The decline towards the end of the century may indicate changes of taste and fashion, and the rise of photography. The “entry into the world of consumption” claimed by Steinbach may instead indicate a marked increase in disposable incomes rather than a basic change of working-class consumer behaviour.

And when that income faltered, the ornaments could be always pawned: Stallybrass quotes Ellen Ross, who explained that “the ‘bank’ of ornaments” on a working class mantel was indeed a bank, since it represented the scarce resources which could nevertheless be pawned and turned into cash in times of need (Ross 1993:46). Objects, and the memories attached too them, did not stay in place for the poor. They could rarely become heirlooms” (Stallybrass 1998, 196). This suggests that

²⁴⁸ See Appendix II, p 217.

²⁴⁹ See Appendix II, p 218.

²⁵⁰ See Appendix II, pp 204, 205, 215, 241, 246 and others.

even though they were cheap and cheerful, “images” had monetary as well as emotional value. That monetary value resulted in them being the targets of thievery, as shown by the proceedings of the Old Bailey (*see Appendix III*), and this criminal activity continued in various ways throughout the nineteenth century.

Cost

Victorian Staffordshire figurines, in their day relatively inexpensive ornamental objects that were mass-produced for the masses, sold for a pittance wholesale and rarely much more than that retail, and fashionable only among the poorer classes, whose mantelpieces they graced in great numbers

(Schwarzbach 2001, 7)

Schwarzbach calculates that Staffordshire produced at least 1,000,000 figures each year, and that “double or treble that amount is not an unreasonable figure...hence their cheapness at the time...and their availability to working class families living on very modest incomes” (Schwarzbach 2001, 13). He suggests that this number of figurines was sold annually by street sellers. However he fails to take into account that the image-sellers were also selling plaster of Paris “images.” Many perhaps sold nothing but plaster of Paris figures. This either means that the street sellers sold significantly fewer than 1,000,000 *ceramic* figurines, in which case how and where were the remainder sold, or that they sold, in total, considerably more “images,” both ceramic and plaster of Paris. The figures in the various illustrations and paintings, and those mentioned by writers, appear to be mostly plaster of Paris.

I have examined two sources of costs. The first is within cases recorded in the Proceedings of the Old Bailey (*see Appendix III*), the second is US newspaper stories (*see Appendix II*). Given the wide range of objects the prices cover, and lack of detail in the records, both will only give approximate costs, but are nevertheless valuable. The values recorded in the Old Bailey proceedings are bound to be higher than those in the newspaper reports because thefts would be biased towards higher quality objects in higher-class contexts. Indeed one case was of theft from an earl. They may have been “replacement with new” values, very approximate estimates, inflated by the victim or were second-hand or pawnshop values.

I found that British prices ranging from a farthing to £2/5/0, excluding an exceptional “Old Bow China” pair entitled *The Four Seasons*, which were valued at £20. The average price from 54 records was 5/-. However if I exclude all records over 1/- the average cost is 6d, from 28 records. The US prices ranged from 10 cents to 50 cents, with an average of 30 cents from 17 records

In the mid-nineteenth century a servant in London was paid about 1/- per week, so 6d represents a significant outlay on a non-utilitarian object. There is some conflicting evidence here. According to Mayhew the prices of these objects fell in the mid century and that there was no second-hand trade “in images or chimneypiece ornaments.” “Why,” said one dealer, “I can now buy new figures for 9d, such as not many years ago cost 7s, so what chance of a second-hand sale is there!” (Mayhew 1851, 23). Yet they were considered valuable enough to be stolen

and pawned. Mayhew may have encountered the fake pessimism of an entrepreneur wishing to conceal his real income.

Value: crime and the chimney-piece

That mantelpiece ornaments were highly esteemed by their owners and had exchange value as second-hand or pawned objects is revealed by their attractiveness to thieves and burglars. A number of cases where “images” and “chimney ornaments” had been stolen were listed in the proceedings of the Old Bailey, as well as in newspapers across the world. Image sellers also occasionally got themselves into trouble, and were in addition the victims of crimes ranging from casual violence to murder.²⁵¹ It is certain that these accessible records are just a small sample of the worldwide total.

Although examination of court records around the world would provide much information, within the scope of this study a survey was limited to digitised Old Bailey proceedings, and newspaper stories in the UK, US and Australia. I have included a number of edited extracts from Old Bailey proceedings in Appendix III. The range of extracts is limited by the number of records that have been digitised to date (December 2015) and the spotty survival of original material.

²⁵¹ See Appendix II, pp 170, 187, 188.

11: Object Worlds

Ruesch and Kees [demonstrated] that people arrange objects to display order and disorder, shaping their surroundings to introduce order...objects...have been surprisingly little studied within communication, leaving the topic wide open for future research

(Leeds-Hurwitz 1993, 132)

Things with which we live

As metaphors, miniatures can tell us much about people in the past, their “states of being, activities, relationships, needs, fears, hopes.” These are most useful “when they reflect beliefs of which the makers, individually or collectively (as society), were unaware of or, if aware, unwilling to express openly, to verbalize” (Prown 2000, x). A miniature, what Stewart calls a “material allusion to a text which is no longer available to us” (Stewart 1993, 60), often represents a once-tangible original that no longer exists, as well as thoughts that archaeologists can only attempt to re-invent. In exploring the miniature, archaeologists are presented with an opportunity to look into the “the interior space and time” of the people they study (Stewart 1993, xii).

If it is accepted that humans and materiality run in parallel, then the worlds that people live and function in necessarily contain objects. I call these ‘object worlds’. The term “object worlds” is not original (see Meskell 2004) but is not widely used, and certainly rarely in the study of material culture, and where it is used it seems to

refer to a passively-experienced set of objects, such as the natural and human-made environment. Meskell uses the term in her discussions of materiality (Meskell 2004, 3) but doesn't define it. It's as if the object world is so familiar that it doesn't require definition. A hyphenated version, "object-world," is defined by Dictionary.com as: "the world outside of oneself and one's perception of the objects in it." There are two principal categories of object worlds. The first is the object world that has been created by the societies in which we exist – the street furniture, the buildings, the vehicles, the external stuff that fills and facilitates our everyday life but over which we either have little or no control, or the control of which we share with others. The second category, which concerns us here, is the object world that we create for ourselves, the things we surround ourselves with through choice, the things we consume. My research rests on the assumption that miniature things make up a significant proportion of that object world.

Importantly, these object worlds can be divided into, on the one hand, utilitarian "necessities" and, on the other hand, objects acquired for their symbolism, for their meaning to their possessor, rather than their usefulness. This can be applied to miniatures, which, as objects of desire, are acquired because their owners like them. They delight in them.

There is of course a third important group of object worlds in which no-one lives – miniature worlds, reduced versions of the full-scale planet that we populate. A fourth category could be said to be those object worlds created by artists, worlds that have never existed, nor ever will exist other than in imagination and in

miniature, but are miniature manipulations of reality designed for effect, to make us react and think, to communicate the artists' messages.

Another way of looking at an object world would be through the lens of *landscape*, when we might talk of "objectscape" (Dahn 2013) or, I suggest, a "parlourscape," a "miniaturescape" and so on. For me this implies a detached view from a distance, be that geographical, cultural or temporal. Daniel Miller calls something similar "domains" (Miller 1998, 6), but again that sounds rather like looking at something on a map. My approach is hopefully a more immersed and involved one.

In her 2004 book *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt*, Lynn Meskell begins her introduction by quoting Roland Barthes: "We constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified" (Meskell 2004, 1). Barthes' words underline the archaeological theme that runs throughout my research, for "archaeology is destruction" (Wheeler 1954). It is also true that the closer I've examined the objects that are the subject of this research, the more mysteries I have uncovered. This makes sense, for in my experience it is often muttered by those at the bottoms of archaeological trenches that the excavation raises more questions than it answers.

Object worlds as reaction

Paul Mullins and Nigel Jeffries quote Wharton and Codman, who regarded the acquisition of bric-à-brac as a reaction from “bare stiff rooms” (Mullins and Jeffries 2012, np). I suggest that for the working classes there were a number of reactions – to the emptiness of poverty; to lack of individuality; to monotony; to the overbearing middle and upper classes; to the explosion of knowledge created by exhibitions, museums and institutions; to class consciousness, to powerlessness, to urban life. As archaeologists, Mullins and Jeffries, like many researchers of the nineteenth century, understandably use artefacts discovered during excavations as their exemplars. They do not mention plaster of Paris ornaments. This leads them to make some assumptions that are only partially correct. For example they state that: “figurines...were not necessarily intended to represent anything concrete” (Ibid). This may have been true of many ceramic miniatures, but as I have demonstrated in this study, many if not all the objects sold by image-sellers did represent concrete originals that possessed a variety of messages with which the buyer/displayer identified.

Even a crude spotted cat represented “catness”—domesticity, warmth, companionship, “cuteness,” perhaps superstition, memories of pets, comfort. A figurine of Venus represented an ancient statue, bringing with it all the weight of the distant past, beauty, “culture” the “wisdom of the ages” and fitted the period’s general fashion for things classical (something a lumpy Staffordshire would have failed to do).

Mullins and Jeffries suggest that the consumption patterns underlined by the US Gilded Age were “transatlantic phenomena.” My research indicates that the activities of image sellers created a worldwide phenomenon, albeit limited to the rapidly industrialising nations.

Object worlds as collections

Humanity can be divided into two parts: those who collect and the others

(Karp 2006, 11)

Archaeologists have sometimes had to twist themselves into painful contortions to explain the discovery of multiples of objects they perceived as child-related. I am going to suggest that, for example, that it is possible that finds of multiple miniature tea sets are evidence of collecting. Very few, if any, archaeologists have offered collecting as an interpretation of unusual assemblages of miniatures. Indeed, if we avoid the definition of a collection as multiple examples of the same or similar objects, many assemblages of miniatures (and other objects) may have simply been collections created for pleasure or interest.

“An object of material culture is any object that a person deems worthy of collecting” (Karp 2006, 26). Children may collect miniature objects, and indeed may have been encouraged to do so, but the vast majority of collections were (and are) assembled by adults. A collection may only include a few objects, which do not have to be duplicates or even similar.

A collection is a device for the “objectification of desire” (Stewart 1993, xii). The urge of humans to collect is not a modern phenomenon that emerged from nothing in the nineteenth century but has always been present (Pearce 1994, 1995).

However it became much more widespread with the connected developments of mass-production, commodification and affluence. Collecting of miniatures in large numbers by the well-off was so common as to be unremarkable by the end of the nineteenth century (e.g the Florence Babbitt collection in Minneapolis), and there is no reason to doubt that smaller numbers of collected miniatures accumulated in the homes of the middle classes and those working class people with a little disposable income.

There was an old woman named Babbitt

Who gathered up dishes from habit

If you have an old dish, she'll nab it

(Anon 2010b)

It could be suggested that collecting as we know it, that is the accumulation of numbers of objects related in form (e.g. model cars) or function (e.g. memorabilia), is a result of the ability of people since the beginning of the nineteenth century to acquire non-utilitarian material in significant amounts. Whereas at first collections might be displayed on a mantel, they soon required special display cases and eventually became too large to display at all, and would be stored. However the collector, although he or she can no longer often (if ever) view the entire collection in a single glance, at least enjoys the knowledge that the collection exists.

In historical archaeological contexts, it is rarely suggested that a particular assemblage might represent part of a collection. This is perhaps due to assumptions that collections have to be large, consist of identical or duplicate objects (e.g. model cars), reflect high status (e.g. museums or cabinets of curiosities) or be eccentric (e.g. Carmichael 1971). It is ironic that archaeologists who as part of their profession collect artefacts should rarely recognise collections in the field, and perhaps it speaks of elitism that archaeologists hoard factory-manufactured Samian bowls, but apportion little value to factory-produced fairings or ceramic dolls. That collections of miniatures are archaeologically recognisable and valuable is demonstrated by the Sandhills Project, which excavated “working-class” cottages in an Alderley Edge mining community, and was able to throw unexpectedly detailed light on at least one past resident by discovering evidence of her collection of ceramics and by not dismissing them as mere curiosities (Casella 2004).

A slave may have collected a few “meaningless” objects to provide an element of identity. A poor old woman may have collected a few cheap dolls to create a fantasy childhood. Someone may have collected marbles just because they are decorative objects. Pearce calls collections narratives of experience, and objects kinds of fiction where “values are created out of rubbish” which people use to communicate and remember experience and to build self-knowledge...through them adults play games and experience magical transformations: we are all the heroes of our collections” (Pearce 1995, 412). “Collections are about recollection. Collections exclude the world and are symbolic of it.” They “convey satisfaction and confer serenity upon

the collectors who accumulate them” (Karp 2006, 11). Each collector partly defines him/herself by what is collected” (Ibid, 27).

While people today use online social networking, amongst other facets of daily life, to display information about themselves, in the recent past, the social medium was the parlour, or whatever space was frequented by visitors to the household. Here they would gain an impression of not only the status of those who lived here, but also their wealth, their political views, their sense of humour, their intellect, their piety, their sexuality, their fashionability. A variety of material objects were used to convey this information, as well as the overall effect of the space. But few communicated as directly as miniatures. “Miniaturizing gave consumers the power to display a vast range of symbols on their mantel: it was not uncommon for a Victorian home to showcase Presidential, historical, Classical, natural, popular, and colonial motifs simultaneously” (Mullins 2000).

These little-studied mantelpiece collections, were arranged to shape people’s surroundings, to display order and disorder and to communicate messages and important meanings (Leeds-Hurwitz 1993, 132; Davidson 2004, 102). The choices (“judicious consumerism”) made by individuals in acquiring toys and especially decorative objects such as ceramic figurines and bric-à-brac provide information that can shed light on issues such as resistance to racism (Davidson 2004, 102). But bric-à-brac has suffered because of its present-day associations. It is faintly looked down upon these days, and books on, for example, English mass-produced pottery, catalogue and describe wares, discuss modellers and potters and dates and

monetary values, but rarely ask what the originals did. The potential roles of these objects can nevertheless “objectify the self” by demonstrating the owner's “power, vital erotic energy, and place in the social hierarchy”, by “revealing the continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past, and signposts to future goals” as well as placing individuals in social networks “as symbols of valued relationships” (Csikszentmihalyi 1993, 23). Archaeologists perhaps forget that these objects can recall friendships, and that “tokens of remembrance, respect and love typically have trivial intrinsic value, and the labor invested in them is usually voluntary” (Csikszentmihalyi 1993, 28). Reminding us that “meaningfulness...often has little to do with exchange value”, Mullins suggests that “reducing these goods to frivolous ornaments disregards that even a seemingly “whimsical” object can harbor a penetrating, yet oblique, social commentary” (Mullins 2001, 159).

Despite an imposed physical uniformity, as the result of compartmentalised living in tenements and terraces, and lack of variety resulting from small disposable incomes, no two nineteenth-century homes looked alike, each had been individualised. Sometimes this happened by default, the result of lack of maintenance or facilities. Sometimes poverty was so extreme that the inhabitants owned very little, much to the horror of commentators, who recoiled from any general lack of things. More often than not, householders added some decorative “touches” – a significant word, invoking the physical touch of human hands, “touching on things” as in referring to them through language and thought, and “being touched,” being emotionally moved by something. Of course, there were further meanings: “he was a little

touched” or slightly deranged, and “touched by the devil.” These touches may have been minimal – a page torn from a magazine, or a calendar illustration, but “it is a matter for thankfulness that even in the poorest classes of homes there is, as a rule, some attempt at ornamentation” (Wright 1892, 311).

Object worlds in working-class homes

What does it mean, to live in a room?

(Perec 1997, 24)

Despite being described in 1874 as being filled with “modern filth” by the antiquarian John Leader and “anything more squalid, more wretched or more dangerous than the dwellings that have been formed out of [the remains of Sheffield Manor by the cottages of miners] it would be difficult to conceive. Its smells excel those of Cologne in strength and variety, while the association of ancient luxury with modern filth is quite Egyptian in its character and thoroughly Irish in its details” (Leader 1874, 42).²⁵² An archaeological investigation by Crewe and Hadley discovered that those dwelling in this “Irish” “filth” in fact possessed “ceramic ornaments, many with religious or political significance, and they had keepsakes and souvenirs of places visited (such as the Great Exhibition of 1851)... cups and plates depicting nursery rhymes, the alphabet, or children’s games, as well as toys (Crewe and Hadley 2013, 92).²⁵³

²⁵² A reference to the poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in which he “counted two and seventy stenches/All well defined, and several stinks!” in Cologne.

²⁵³ Finds included a “frozen Charlotte” figure (see p 47).

Atha, discussing Betram and Pevsner's portrayal of "working-class domestic domain" notes that they present it "as a demoralized and dejected place." Betrand's dismissal of "the over-decorated, and in all the sentimental paraphernalia and memorabilia on display" promoted "a thorough cleansing of all useless ornaments and frippery [that] instilled a moral agenda [and] effectively removed any undesirable manifestations of taste [displacing] "whatnots and bric-a-brac" (Atha 2012, 217). As Schwarzbach realised: "working class families struggled constantly against strong odds simply to possess any object that would signal to others and to themselves that the shabby, damp, cramped and unhealthy quarters that they occupied were not just a place to live but a home" (Schwarzbach 2001, 48).

The rookery: fact or fantasy?

The phenomenon of significant working-class consumption was world-wide, but is handled clumsily by some archaeologists. In Melbourne, Australia, excavations in the "slum" of Casseldon Place produced material culture that failed to match the reputation of the community: in one site "the Maloney's were keen to demonstrate respectability" claim Smith and Hayes. They suggest that several sherds of Spode china can only have arrived there as heirlooms or were purchased second-hand. They provide no supporting evidence for this assertion. The presence of "at least four Staffordshire figures" signified that "the Maloney's had enough disposable income to purchase decorative ornaments [which challenged] the slum stereotype commonly applied to the Little Lon district...the Maloney's may have been illiterate, unskilled, Irish and working class, yet this collection shows us that they were not passive victims of poverty" (Smith and Hayes 2010). There was of course no

archaeological evidence to support the authors' contention that the Maloneys were "illiterate."

An article in a 2011 edition of *Current Archaeology* sums up a popular view of working-class life in an area not far from Plumtree Court. Inspired by a local artists's collaboration with the Museum of London, illustrated with images by Cruickshank, Hogarth and Pierdon and quoting Dickens, Beames and Gore, it paints a dark picture of the infamous "rookery" of St Giles, to the west of Holborn, but within walking distance of Plumtree Court. Rescue archaeological excavations in 2006-8 failed to demonstrate this expected squalor, and had to be enhanced by what the magazine calls "virtual archaeology" – archaeology "bursting through disciplinary constraints." This approach demonstrates a risk associated with the "beyond archaeology" concept, which can result in over-imaginative interpretations. The article conveys an overall impression of grimness, but includes a quotation from Thomas Beames that notes the survival of relics of "stately edifices" and notes the discovery of what it calls "an exceptional assemblage" of finer wares and other evidence of a "more socially diverse population that the impression of an undifferentiated mass of the urban poor conveyed by many of the historical sources" (Palm-Gold 2011).

There was general consensus amongst the *flaneurs* and slummers of the nineteenth century that the lives of working people as well as their surroundings, were overwhelmingly monotonous. Ginn quotes Edward Denison, who wrote in 1867 that there wasn't much "actual suffering" as in starvation or illness in the East of London, but "what is so bad is the habitual condition of this mass of humanity – its uniform

mean level, the absence of anything more civilizing than a grinding organ to raise the ideas beyond the daily bread and beer, the utter want of education, the complete indifference to religion” (Ginn 2008, 181). Ginn goes on to write that “key reformers...asserted that the visual monotony of the landscape and the soulless tedium of life were essential and defining features” of working-class areas. As discussed above, this view was probably encouraged by gloomy woodcuts and engravings, and later by greyscale photographs.

Perhaps there was and is a relationship between tedium (working in a factory/being wealthy) and the need (?) to demonstrate that despite what appears to be a boring life, the individual is individual and possesses a unique, interesting identity/personality/set of tastes.

Parlours as phantasmagorias

In the nineteenth century, the working classes had been presented with numerous examples of *things*. They were on show in the series of nineteenth century large-scale exhibitions that inspired and was followed closely by the creation of vast collections of things in an explosive growth of museums. Indeed, this was partly deliberate. Walter Benjamin quotes French historian Hippolyte Taine, who declared in 1855 that the national exhibitions were the result of a wish “to amuse the working class” (Benjamin 1973, 165).

The objects that working people peered at in the nineteenth century plethora of exhibitions and museums had, at least at the time of their display, no practical use.

They were there not to manufacture anything, or to be consumed or used, but to inspire, to communicate ingenuity and power. It is also significant that as the century went on, the exhibitions also included many objects that were not machinery or industrial products, but were presented as “art”. The list of sculpture on show at the 1851 Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, for example, is long (and included a plaster cast gallery), and persuaded visitors that it was acceptable and desirable to have representations of classical statues on display in their homes. Miniature versions of the most sensational and notorious sculpture in the 1851 exhibition, Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave, were subsequently to appear beneath glass domes in many a genteel middle-class parlour (James 1903, 114).

Perhaps, given the popularity of classical subjects in the stock of figurine sellers since the late eighteenth century, the exhibitions encouraged an already-existing enthusiasm. That these objects were available for a shilling or less meant that one could build a collection on one's mantelpiece, even if that collection consisted of half a dozen cheap and cheerful miniatures. Exhibitions and museums may have been intended by their creators and curators as places of education, but they also acted as "phantasmagoria into which people entered in order to be distracted" (Benjamin 1973, 168). People realised that they could create miniature phantasmagoria in their parlours (Highmore 2002, 14).

This was associated, as Benjamin realised, with the advent of the interior. Life no longer went on in environments where the line between exterior and interior was blurred. A front door separated them. Indeed, by the mid nineteenth century, social

commentators were often horrified that this barrier was so thin, expressing shock that the front door often opened directly into the parlour, and dismay when the door was damaged or absent. Benjamin noted that “for the private citizen, for the first time the living-space became distinguished from the place of work” (Benjamin 1973, 167), and by the end of the nineteenth century it was deemed disgraceful if people worked in the home (see page 141). Benjamin called the interior “the universe for the private citizen...a box in the world theatre” (Benjamin 1973, 167-8). He also declared that “the collector was the true inhabitant of the interior” (Benjamin 1973, 167), and although he was probably thinking of the middle- and upper-class collector, the phenomenon rang true for the working-class collector of knick-knacks on her mantelpiece. A small collection of ornaments changed an enclosed space into an interior.

Although in the 1950s people still stood or sat in doorways of soon to be cleared “slum” communities to meet and chat with neighbours and passers-by, more recent developments have discouraged interaction to the point where “loitering” in the street is actively discouraged and regarded as suspicious or even “anti-social” behaviour, and in some countries eye-contact in the street can have fatal consequences. Today we often move from the interior of our homes into the interior of our cars and then into the interior of shopping malls, the modern equivalent of the shopping arcades that paralleled the rise of the domestic interior in the nineteenth century.

So the interiors of homes, however “humble,” began to enclose everyday life. With the rise of the interior came the concomitant rise of non-utilitarian things displayed in it, to the point where by the late nineteenth century people with the means to do so crammed as many things as possible into their interiors, and those not wealthy enough to do so at least wished to. The sparsely furnished rural room, with its always open half-door, became an (often romanticised) thing of the past, and lack of furniture and things was now a mark of poverty and the disapproval that often went with it.

Networks and entanglements

Suppose we stop looking at individual objects. See them instead as participating in a long stream of events that unfold through time; chart their flow; then consider persons only as the points where flows of objects originate, congregate and from which they disperse. This long view takes both producers, distributors, and recipient-users into account at once

(Douglas 1994: 17)

A stream of events

- In April 1820, Yorgos Kentrotas uncovered a damaged marble statue of a semi-naked woman on the Greek island of Melos. Reassembled, the result quickly became known as the “Venus de Milo.”

- Some time in the 1840s, Henry Mayhew spoke with a London costermonger, who complained that it was no longer worth dealing in second-hand “chimney-piece ornaments” because they only cost 9d new.
- Off Port Arthur, Tasmania, in 1870, Marcus Clarke pondered the grave of James May on *L'Isle des Morts*. On this “foolish little island hummocked with graves,” Clarke wrote: “many scoundrels mingle their dust with that of the more fortunate. May (the murderer of the Italian image boy) is rotting there.”
- In 1856 Dublin, one Signor Basilio Angeli had been dismissed as Professor of Italian and Spanish by Trinity College after being accused of not being “a man of liberal education” but instead had been a “figurista or maker of plaster images.”
- Amongst the articles of unclaimed freight sold at the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Ninth Street station in Richmond, Virginia, on July 19th 1893, was “1 hogshead of Plaster Images”.
- In 1907, Pathe Freres made a film, *Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes*, which, in its “scènes dramatiques et réalistes” told the story of little Jacques, who sold plaster figurines on the streets of Paris at the behest of a cruel master, but who was rescued and lived happily ever after.
- For several years the curator of Antiquities at the Louvre, where the Venus de Milo is displayed, received letters from Germany insisting that her arms be re-attached. The writer helpfully included tubes of glue to facilitate the restoration.

- Margaret Odell was transported for seven years in December 1830 for stealing a candlestick, worth two shillings, and two earthenware ornaments, value two pence.
- In May 1800, Robert Blakesley was sentenced to death at the Old Bailey for stealing, amongst other things, two china images worth 6d and five chimney ornaments worth £1.
- In February 2016 I noticed a miniature ceramic fireplace bearing the words “Keep the Home Fires Burning” in the window of a closing-down antiques shop in Oakham. I bought it for £4.00.

The network

My point in assembling this apparently meaningless list of seemingly unrelated happenings and non-happenings, events major and minor—*islands*, French people, a murderer, a statue, thieves, Australia, images—is that they are very much related, however much they are separated by time and location. They are all “nodes” in a network that extends geographically over most of the globe and which extends both backwards and forwards in time. When I came across George Godwin’s inauspiciously-titled magazine, *The Builder*, and found his illustration of a chimney-piece in Plumtree Court, I inadvertently and irreversibly joined and became part of that network. This is an important concept in the scope of my research, and is worth exploring.

Although a number of writers have explored the ideas of “webs” and of “meshes” I feel that the network concept expressed by Bjørnar Olsen, who writes of its application to archaeology most closely fits my research area. Olsen proposes that the network links related “qualities in time and space” (Olsen 2003, 98). The network approach is both dynamic, in that the investigative and analytical focus can be moved from node to node without severing their links, and static – the network exists, fixed by its standing in time and space. It can also extend into virtuality, as nodes can be expressions of thought and imagination, or be ephemeral, or be invisible but nevertheless “real” digital collections of bytes. It is not a neat spider-web pattern of interconnected threads, with the researcher waiting hungrily at its centre to capture the next fact to become caught in its silk. A better metaphor would be the fisher’s net, at one moment stretched across an ocean of facts, the next bundled in the hold, perhaps with tears and tangles, each knot and trapped piece of debris now in close proximity to others that at other times are far distant. In normal life the net is crumpled into several dimensions of space and time. It is the archaeologist’s challenge to pick through that multi-dimensional tangle, for each handling of the net brings different nodes into close proximity, and into focus.

My view is that every archaeological artefact exists as a node in a network. It is linked to those who made it, who owned it, who used it, who gave it meaning and who eventually “excavated” it. It is linked with the developments of the technologies that enabled its creation and its discovery. It is linked to others of its kind. It is this network that I am exploring, node by node, in this project. In truth the project is doomed to be incomplete, because my research and this thesis have

become part of an ever-expanding network. This means that you and all subsequent readers have become nodes, and the network will go on, I hope, expanding far beyond my untangling of a small part of it.

It would be possible, archaeologically, to record the mantelpiece cat, locate similar examples, attempt to assign dating and details of its manufacture, give it a label and leave it at that. This information might suggest that the owner was working class, but we already knew that. The basic description would not provide much “colour”, a slightly pejorative term for our interest in and curiosity about what the people with relationships with the object were “really like.” The network approach allows us to go far beyond the coldly analytical and to explore “flavour.”

One could apply Charles Orser’s term “entanglement” (Orser 1996, 117) to this web of relationships. While “tangle” might imply untidiness or chaos, “entanglement” can suggest “a complicated relationship” (Oxford dictionary) or indeed something on which one can get caught up on, like barbed wire in warfare. It could be said that I became caught up on this pre-existing web, never to escape.

The relationships that spin out from the mantelpiece could, interestingly, be added to almost without limit, creating something like a “Muir web” (Mannahatta Project 2009), a graphical representation of an ecology named after naturalist John Muir, who wrote in his journal for July 27 1869: “when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find that it is bound fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be

broken, to everything in the universe” (Fox 1981, 291). For instance, the parrot could be linked to the bird on which it was modelled, and also seafarers, Billy Culmer, the several parrots on image-sellers boards, and all the symbolism associated with this creature.

The cat on the mantelpiece in a Holborn alley therefore serves as a node in a network that extends not only into the hustle and bustle of mid-nineteenth century London, but also to Italy and from thence to Europe, North America and beyond. It served as a link in a chain of imagery that started with eighteenth century woodcuts and ended with twentieth century photographic postcards and which included nineteenth century romantic paintings filled with allegorical messaging. It demonstrated directly that working class people desired and were able to acquire decorative objects, and specifically miniatures such as cats and parrots. Indirectly, the mantelpiece was embedded in an activity that saw working class people not only buying miniatures of animals, fruit bowls and nosegays, but also political figures and heroes, playwrights and poets, actors and actresses and a host of classical celebrities. Those who arranged the mantelpiece would have heard comic ballads sung about image-sellers (*see page 262*), learned to read using children’s books featuring them (*see page 187*), and, in the popular press, read poems and stories about their lives (*for example see page 183*).

Douglass Bailey, talking with Bjørnar Olsen, speaks of humans becoming “entangled and “assemblaged” with non-humans” (Bailey 2010, 9). He considers that: “the

nature of things, their ownness (what has been called the “thingness of the thing”) is easier to grasp in the less conspicuous, ordinary and far more common objects” (Bailey 2010, 10).

Figure 207: *That’s where we are right now.* 2014 Cartoon by Edward Steed, *The New Yorker*.

<http://www.newyorker.com/cartoons/a18753>

12: Mantelpieces, miniatures and miniaturisation

Discussion, conclusions and narratives

Speaking of what is: the power of common things

Comment parler de ces “choses communes”, comment les traquer plutôt, comment les débusquer, les arracher à la gangue dans laquelle elles restent engluées, comment leur donner un sens, une langue: qu’elles parlent enfin de ce qui est, de ce que nous sommes

(Pérec 1989, 11)

How are we to speak of these ‘common things’, how to track them down rather, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are²⁵⁴

George Perec, who peered through imagined keyholes to hunt for “common things”, was a writer of inventories, a writer of life as lists of things, and was inspired by the slyly voyeuristic cartoons of Saul Steinberg (Figure 208). He would have no doubt been fascinated by, as I am, the nineteenth-century cross-section illustrations of tenements, with their displays of “common things,” that I’ve included in this

²⁵⁴ Translation at <http://www.daytodaydata.com/georgesperec.html>

study.²⁵⁵ I share with Perec the belief that these objects tell of what we are. In doing so, they possess “value.”

Figure 208: *No Vacancy* (1949) Saul Steinberg, from *The Art of Living*. Compare with the New York tenement in Figure 32.

http://www.emerson.arch.ethz.ch/lectures#_fs12

²⁵⁵ See Figure 43, Figure 54 and Figure 193.

Value

There are instances where it is difficult to avoid the impression that objects come ready-loaded with this property that can be called “value.” For instance, a beach covered with pebbles is inanimate, the product of millions of years of erosion that occurred mostly before humans evolved. We have no cultural education in the *value* of pebbles, they don’t feature in the national curriculum, there are no pebble museums or galleries (*although see* Figure 209), yet many of us delight in pebbles – we observe them, hunt amongst them for “special” examples, and pick them up and take them home to place on shelves and mantelpieces. This appears to be a common behaviour, and has been since Mesolithic times (e.g. Rhuddian, Clwyd).²⁵⁶

Pebbles are so meaningful that it is possible to obtain floor coverings and kitchen worktops bearing their images. We believe that pebbles with naturally-occurring holes are associated with good luck, healing or protection (Rowntree 2012). We are responding to some intrinsic allure that pebbles possess that could be called “thing power,” responding to and translating that power into a desire to pick up, handle, possess and display them. Pebbles convey messages, even though we might not be able to translate those messages. Pebbles are miniature chunks of the world, and our ownership of them means that we “possess” at least a little of our planet. By picking up and collecting a pebble I have altered, albeit minutely, the surface of the Earth, and made it my own. In a world where we are forced to occupy smaller and

²⁵⁶ Five deliberately inscribed/decorated pebbles were found in the 1970s at Rhuddian, Clwyd, Wales, in a site dating to approx. 9,000 years BP (Berridge and Roberts 1994, 115).

smaller areas of its surface, owning several-million-year-old lumps of water- and wind-sculpted rock adds significantly to our sense of place. In addition, so much meaning may be concentrated in a tiny pebble that, polished and mounted, it can represent love and fidelity.

70:

A COMPANION TO

3. PEBBLES.

27. Varieties of the Egyptian Pebble.
28. An Egyptian Pebble of extraordinary size, curiously variegated.
29. Another, whose veins and spots resemble a man with a fool's cap on.
30. Another with a curious lusus naturæ in it, representing a head of a Roman emperor.
- 30 A. An English Pebble, the spots in which resemble a man's head,
31. Variety of Pebbles found in places near London.
32. Ditto, whose veins and stripes resemble those of wood.
- 32 A. Ditto, from Alkington, the seat of the late Sir Ashton Lever, near Manchester.
33. Pebbles from Hampstead Heath.
34. Ditto, from Hertfordshire.
35. A beautiful variegated Pebble, from Oberstein, in the Palatinate.
36. Another, very large.
37. Varieties of plumb-pudding stones, from Hertfordshire. These are congeries of pebbles, naturally cemented in one mass by a siliceous matter, and are peculiar to England, but rarely met with out of Hertfordshire. They are distinguished by the colour of the ground or cement, as white, yellow, red, &c. the red is scarce.
38. A curiously veined Pebble, from Staffordshire.

Figure 209: *Pebbles*, 1790. Anon *A Companion to the Museum (Late Sir Ashton Lever's)* p 70.

This slight diversion leads me to claim that this intrinsic agency of the object as something possessing “value” is even more concentrated in the miniature, an object created by and shared amongst humans. I have already noted that often these valued objects are not accurate models but are objects that represent *ideas*. For example, mantelpiece cats were (and are) frequently poorly modelled and bizarrely decorated. That hardly mattered. They exuded “catness.”

The ubiquity of miniature objects, their existence since the earliest times, and our delight, comfort and interest on encountering them, is such that I hypothesise that there exists a sort of ready-made “slot” within the human make-up into which the concept of small things fits. Certainly, present-day cultures around the world make similar, if not identical, use of miniatures, be they tiny super heroes, Barbie, Little Kitty figures, erotic figurines, representations of ancient Greek gods, grotesque but cheerful pigs, soft toys, religious symbols, cute cats and even miniature three-dimensional “selfies.” That a child accepts its first meeting with a miniature quite happily, instead of recoiling with horror at a bizarrely-shrunken version of reality, suggests that this “slot” has existed since humans evolved, but became easier to fill as mass-produced miniatures became widely available.

Carrying my hypothesis further, the “slot” would be hard-wired to the mind, but there it would be connected to different areas depending on age, gender, taste, culture, emotions and so on. Hence the “slot” of a child would be filled by different objects than that of an elderly adult. However it might be that the connections formed during childhood remain, to be activated later in life by an interest in, say, model railways or miniature villages. At this time cross-connections might occur with nostalgia, regret and similar notions.²⁵⁷ These connections would be activated, switched on, by triggers such as objects on mantelpieces.

²⁵⁷ In a recent Twitter exchange, two historical archaeologists complained that when they asked communities for historical memories, all they got was childhood nostalgia.

A challenge raised by this concept is identifying what evolutionary advantage would be conferred by the plugging-in of miniatures. For it is true that it is possible to survive entirely successfully without ever possessing or even seeing a miniature object. Perhaps being able to conceive the world in miniature is linked to creativity, imagination and the ability to plan ahead and avoid danger. Or, as Bronze Age and Neolithic miniatures of buildings suggest, to facilitate construction, or envisioning a whole. Perhaps it is a link to the concept of distance, to the understanding of things that are a long way away (this is suggested by the possible link between the development of the ability to represent linear perspective from the fifteenth century onwards and model-making – Leonardo da Vinci and others were actively creating architectural models at the time). Or, as demonstrated by our instinctive cradling of tiny things like Frozen Charlottes, our reactions to miniatures are related to the evolutionary advantages gained by caring for helpless infants – miniature people.

It could be argued that these objects are merely blanks onto which their owners impose their individual “meanings,” rather like Barthe’s “virtually empty” Eiffel Tower that can mean everything (Barthe 1979, 4).²⁵⁸ This could be true, after all I’ve shown above that, for example, a plaster Venus can have a number of differing associations.²⁵⁹ But amongst nineteenth-century working classes, there was general recognition that Venus was ancient, and, as Dickens’ Mr Dennis confirms, represented beauty.²⁶⁰ Individual feelings about a plaster cat might differ, but there was sufficient agreement about the “catness” of cats to make these plaster pets a

²⁵⁸ It is ironic that in the twentieth century, miniature Eiffel Towers became a familiar sight on mantelpieces, even of those who have never been to France.

²⁵⁹ See page 319.

²⁶⁰ *Barnaby Rudge*, see above, p 323.

staple product of image-sellers. Barthe goes on to write that the Tower “attracts meaning” (Ibid), which I would interpret as agency, just as plaster Venuses or cats attract meaning.

Future work

In this study I have encountered much unexplored territory. Like any pioneering explorer, who records unfamiliar coastlines, new mountain ranges, newly-met indigenous peoples and the like, I have used a broad brush. As an introduction, it is unavoidably a work in progress. I have assembled some 136 illustrations and nearly 300 contemporary texts, all of which demand further scrutiny beyond the scope of this thesis. There are almost certainly many more references to nineteenth-century miniature objects that I have yet to discover, and many more clues that will allow me to learn more about the people who delighted in them. As I travelled my research journey I also started two projects that will continue:

Ethnoarchaeology: The mantelpiece project



Figure 210: Charity shop miniatures from the author’s collection on a “mobile mantelpiece.”

To examine people's interactions with miniature mantelpiece ornaments and identify patterns, if present, I constructed a portable mantelpiece (*Mills' Mobile Mantelpiece*, Figure 210) that can be moved to and located in any room with an empty wall space. In an initial pilot in the *Paper Gallery*, Manchester, a supply of charity shop miniatures was provided, and people were encouraged to choose and arrange them as they wished on the mantelpiece. The results of each assemblage were recorded photographically. This was successful in attracting both interest and a number of different arrangements. I shall develop and repeat the exercise in as many differing environments as possible.

Contemporary archaeology: the archaeology of charity shops:



Figure 211: Archaeology of the charity shop (photograph, the author)

My work on the mantelpiece and on the archaeology of charity shops follows roughly the approach described by Wilkie and Bartoy (2000). I want to look at the descendants of those who lived in the nineteenth century—us—in order to attempt to demonstrate their lived experience. It is those descendants who provide charity shops with their stock and who buy the miniatures displayed there. It is their descendants who accumulate collections of china pigs and frogs and who construct

model railways and dolls houses, and who display nostalgia for an age that no one now living can remember.

In creating this project I erected a hypothesis: that the types of miniatures on display in charity shops (for example Figure 211) reflect their hinterland communities. Because they involve patterns of discard charity shops can be regarded as archaeological sites with continually-changing assemblages of artefacts. Within those assemblages, it is significant which miniature objects are popular, and unpopular, which disappear from the shelves and which languish.

As a pilot I recorded the miniature objects on sale in a number of shops operated by small charities (i.e. those with single outlets and without large-scale sales centralising businesses) in Nottingham, in areas that could be recognised as ranging from working-class to middle-class (as defined by average income). Initial results were encouraging, suggesting for example, that lower income areas preferred “realistic” animals to “cartoon” animals (Mills 2014).

Objects of Delight – conclusions

Though they are not of marble, and would perhaps never be thought of, in connection with exhibitions of statuary, as “things of art,” yet sure we are that there are many who feel the beauty of these images, where affectation of higher pretensions to taste would disown seeing it. No wonder, then, that these innocent little creatures are so popular as mantel and hearth ornaments

(Harbaugh 1860)

The mantelpiece, once ubiquitous in nineteenth-century working-class homes across the industrialising world, formed a stage on which Harbaugh’s “innocent little creatures” – miniature versions of animals, people and things, real or imaginary – performed.

A delight in “intricate innovations”

I took the title of my research from a 2011 newspaper article by Pat Kane in which he wrote of “our sheer delight in the intricate innovations that our fellow humans serve up to us. We are radical animals - able to distance ourselves from our instincts sufficiently enough to shape the world according to our imaginations” (Kane 2011 29). Kane was writing about 21st century consumerism, nevertheless his words apply to my significant over-arching premise, which is that:

Since the start of the industrial revolution, working-class people shaped their domestic worlds by delighting in miniature objects, “intricate innovations,” that were

previously available only to elites. These decorative, non-utilitarian objects were known as “images.”

Some of these miniatures, manufactured from robust ceramics, survived to become antiques and collectibles, or to be excavated on archaeological sites. I have concluded that their enduring presence has overly influenced our vision of the nineteenth-century working-class interior. An even greater number of small-scale objects were made from cheaper, but fragile, plaster of Paris. These have almost completely vanished, apart from a few curated survivals, and since plaster of Paris rapidly breaks down in most soils, they are not present as tangible “finds” in the archaeological record.²⁶¹

A delight in “images”

Whilst acknowledging the presence of the ceramic miniature, my research has for the first time examined in detail, and celebrated, the network in which plaster of Paris “images” and those who made, sold and acquired them, were and are entangled. “Images” represented a host of very different originals that provide new insights into nineteenth century working-class life. For example, my research shows that they demonstrated the popularity, in “ordinary” households, of the domestic cat, pushing its importance as a welcome companion back into the eighteenth century, earlier than previously assumed. I’ve also discussed the significance of other beasts, such as parrots and so-called “Staffordshire dogs.”

²⁶¹ Although lime-based plasters survive well on archaeological sites the only archaeological find of a gypsum-based plaster artefact I have found was of the head of a sphinx – a prop from the 1923 film *The Ten Commandments* <<http://www.livescience.com/48321-ten-commandments-sphinx-unearthed.html>>

A delight in the “classical”

I also claim for the first time that the presence on so many working-class mantelpieces of miniature Greek and Roman gods, goddesses and other mythical beings indicates a higher level of, if not always of “knowledge,” certainly of *awareness* of these characters from the distant past. They “meant” something in the nineteenth century. This was also true of literary and intellectual celebrities such as the ever-popular Shakespeare and Milton, and of political and religious figures. There was an interest and delight in the “classical.” Other miniature objects enabled people to indulge their tastes for the sentimental, for the erotic, the humorous, the exotic and the purely decorative. Plaster of Paris images also fed the fantasy of an idyllic past, whether that was a rural utopia or a golden age of chivalry.

A delight in “superfluities”

Though life for many, if not the majority of working-class people across the globe was often hard and challenging, they nevertheless frequently chose to spend a significant amount of their disposable income on “useless” objects. This enables us to judge what these mostly-anonymous people regarded as “valuable.” My research means that we can join nineteenth century working-class people in hearing the heavily-accented cries of the *figurina* and see these “dark-eyed” “sunburnt” “sons of Italy” amongst the bustle of city streets and along quiet country lanes with their trays of “images” on their heads or their baskets slung from their shoulders. We can imagine image-sellers being celebrated in popular song, the tunes of two of which I have resurrected and digitised to accompany my thesis, so that it is possible to hear

them for the first time in over 150 years. Through my research we can now share the familiarity of the “image-boy” or “image-man” by exploring – “excavating” – illustrations in children’s books and alphabets, as well as in chap-books extolling *The Cries of Paris*, *The Cries of London*, *The Cries of New York* and others of their kind. I’ve also “excavated” paintings and photographs. I’ve highlighted the evolution during the nineteenth century of the perception of image-sellers from scruffy peddlers into attractive figures of romance, as reflected in works of art, in verse and in fiction. I’ve collected examples of a *genre* of postcards, apparently an early twentieth-century French romantic enthusiasm. I’ve discovered a couple of ghost stories and at least one fairy tale that would have entertained nineteenth-century “ordinary” readers and listeners, and I’ve posited that there was, and perhaps is, a connection with superstition.

A delight in humour

Several strands of nineteenth-century working-class life run through my research. One is the toughness of everyday existence, here shown by the lives of the itinerant peddlers and by the often violent abuse meted out on working children, as well as bullying, crime, racism and xenophobia. There was also a constant parallel vein of humour that appeared in the popular media of the time, and which included the adventures and misadventures of images, their sellers and buyers, as well as attitudes towards taste, good or bad. That humour frequently reflected the period in echoing what we regard now as the less-attractive traits and attitudes of all classes. It also revealed widespread misogyny, suggesting that women possessed poor taste

and behaved foolishly, for example exchanging their husbands' clothing for striped cats. Yet I believe that it was women who purchased the bulk of the "innocent little creatures" that graced so many mantelpieces.

A delight in group-consciousness

My research has led me to claim that the knick-knacks on the mantelpiece, like the mirror that was often hung above it, "meant something," enough to make them subjects of pride, of status and self-identification, of fun and fascination. They reflected the life, the identity, the thinking, the attitudes, "likes," values and enthusiasms of their owners back into the domestic space. While a little of this might have been driven by emulation or a "striving upwards" (to use George Godwin's 1856 words) I argue that much of the meaning of the miniatures was a concentration of group consciousness which ignored and actively resisted the disapproval of middle-and upper-class commentators who, perhaps threatened by increasing working-class materiality, unsuccessfully belittled the "trash and trumpery" of working-class bric-à-brac.

A delight in "art"

Miniature artefacts, mostly overlooked by archaeologists and historians, show us that nineteenth and early twentieth century working-class life was richer materially (if not in monetary terms) and in meaning than has been previously assumed. From Octavia Hill's poor woman's "bits of things" to Robert Robert's father's pride in his

overmantel collection of bric-à-brac, together with the assemblage on Godwin's Plumtree Court mantelpiece and its spotted cats and parrot, and with the millions of Venuses de Milo and Napoleons and Praying Samuels, to the plaster of Paris busts of Mozart and Beethoven standing on to that *acme* of working-class achievement, the piano, working-class "object worlds" were rich with meaning and heavy with value beyond the few pence or cents of their initial cost. Indeed, to use George Godwin's words, there was a general "love of art."

A worldwide delight

Another highly significant finding is the commonality of working-class taste across the industrialising world during the nineteenth century. The stock in trade of image-sellers was basically the same in Russia or Australia, Brazil or Liberia, the US or Sweden. There were variations that recognised local celebrities or religious sensibilities, but it is apparent that in general the image-sellers and their stock in trade were an important element in a common materiality.

In his 2003 essay *Material Culture after Text: Re-Membering Things*, Bjørnar Olsen wrote: "...the thing is that which gathers, which brings together and which lasts: in other words, it relates qualities in time and space: the ideal node in a network." I started with a thing, a prosaic plaster of Paris cat, on a mid-nineteenth-century mantelpiece in a working-class parlour in "an area of no great note" of Holborn, London. That piece of bric-à-brac was a "node" in a complex network that links the owners of the mantelpiece in 1856 with itinerant street vendors in nearby Shoe

Lane, with northern Italy, Russia, New York, Havana, Napoleon, Venus de Milo, British seaport brothels, charity shops in Nottingham or Leeds, myself, you the reader and beyond. The plaster cat is both part of an assemblage of objects on the mantelpiece and an assemblage of relationships, a network of things, images, words and archaeological and historical evidence.

In summary:

Miniatures were representations, at a reduced scale, of meaningful originals – things, people, works of art. Given the often-low quality of sculpting, the lack of detail (abstraction), the interchangeability of figurine identities (the same mould was used to represent several very different identities) and the fact that many originals were imaginary, miniatures were not generally intended to be accurate portraits but to be “ideas” or stereotypes. A figurine of Nelson or Napoleon or a cat possessed agency that inspired the viewer/owner to think about and conjure up their hero or an animal. They were *images* rather than *models*.

Miniatures were much more than small decorative objects. It is apparent that figurines, from prehistoric times onwards, were complex objects that were created in order to represent *thought* and *behaviour* rather than mirror solid reality. They possessed concentrated ‘power.’ They ‘made’ us want to own and display them. They possessed agency simply by being miniaturised, and triggering a reaction that I suggest is a basic human behaviour.

Counterintuitively, miniatures were and are assumed to have ‘insides’, to possess ‘life’ rather than being three-dimensional pictures, mere lumps of plaster, clay or metal. A miniature cat only “works” if it is assumed to possess qualities of a living, full-sized animal, the property of “catness.”

Miniatures could act as material memories, could *be* memories as well as triggering memories. They could provide memories even when these were absent, and could create and memorialise memories for those who never experienced them.

Miniatures provided an opportunity to wield power for people with limited freedom, or forced by circumstances to lead narrow, monotonous lives. Their owners had the ultimate power of assembling, moving and rearranging an assemblage of objects on a mantelpiece to suit their individual tastes, desires, fantasies and memories.

Miniatures were easily portable from home to home in an age of insecurity and mobility. Since the hearth was at the heart of a household, the assemblage of ornaments created a “home” wherever they were displayed. They acted as a “bank” that could be regularly used as a source of temporary income, and so possessed monetary as well as sentimental value.

I have rediscovered an almost forgotten activity – the peddling of figurines across the nineteenth-century industrialising world. I have refocused attention on a little-known group – the *figurinai*, the image-sellers and makers, and their roles in nineteenth-century life. I have scrutinised, for the first time, a class of miniature objects, the

hundreds of characters they represent and what they tell us about working-class thought. And I have drawn attention to the use of the word “image” and its importance in the material culture of the “long” nineteenth century.

Flavour

Stephen Riggins, analysing a domestic environment, wrote of the overarching importance of “flavour” – the overall impression of a context, its atmosphere and character (Riggins 1994, 115).²⁶² In my experience that is the aim of and challenge facing all archaeology, to achieve a *sense* of life in the past through the study of material things. It has been the aim of this project to use miniature objects to access the “flavour” of nineteenth-century working-class life rather than merely describe it. To sense that life, and to make sense of it.

The objects on mantelpieces were important ingredients of that flavour: their tactility, their dimensionality, their colour, what and who they represented, their values, their humour, their sentimentality, their nostalgia, their eroticism, their fantasies, their magic. That they linked ordinary people in a host of modernising countries with a delight in ancient things – Venuses, Cupids, Apollos and the like – speaks of deeper nuances of that flavour. That they linked with a delight in domesticated animals, in the *ideas* of valued pets – spotted cats, gaudy parrots – speaks of a flavour of gentleness amongst people who had little to spare and whose apparent cruelty is better known. That they linked with the exotic – Grecian urns,

²⁶² Riggins uses the US spelling: “flavor.”

bowls of impossible fruit, vases of never-wilting flowers. That they linked tenement-dwellers with great writers, poets and playwrights – Shakespeares, Miltons, Goethes and others – speaks of an intellectual flavour not often recognised, yet encouraged at the time. That they linked growing populations of working people with figures such as Napoleon and Garibaldi suggests an undercurrent of political resistance that balanced the presence of Washington, Victoria and the ruling classes.

Figure 212: Objects of delight – *London Street Seller*, 1952. Henry Grant (Museum of London).

http://www.museumoflondonimages.com/image_details.php?image_id=134567&wherefrom=keywordresults

13: Two Stories

The image-boy's tale

Shoe Lane. A miserable London morning, grey sky, grey buildings, grey smoke from grey chimneys, grey people. A scrawny, olive-skinned image boy crosses High Holborn from Saffron Hill, dodging two rumbling carts, a barking dog, an early-morning drunk and a small flock of dazed sheep. He heads for the shadowy canyon that is Shoe Lane, on the corner of which a speech seller is bawling some recently-executed miscreant's last confession into the morning hubbub. Bare-footed, the boy is still stiff from a night spent on a heap of straw, huddled beneath two old sacks, in a room shared with five other snoring, snuffling lads. He wants to blow on his chilled fingers, but can't, because he's steadying his tray of figurines on his head as he dodges amongst the throng. He's about eleven or twelve years old, born in Barga, a day's ride from Lucca, a place he only vaguely remembers for its white walls, green hills, dusty roads and warm sunshine. There are no hills in his London, and it seems to be always raining. The crowd thins a little as he passes soot-blackened St Andrew's church, where two beggars crouch, muttering, each side of narrow doorway. One of seven siblings, he and a brother were sold to a grinning *padrone* by his recently-widowed mother when he was ten, and he has more vivid memories of the stumbling, exhausting journey across France than he has of his mother's tearful face. He doesn't know what she received,

just that he was sold for three years, and that he has lost track of when those years are done. His stomach rumbles. In Saffron Hill, in what was once a kitchen, the *padrone* and two old *formatore* cast images in a low-ceilinged ill-lit basement where every surface is white with plaster dust, watched silently by shelves of wall-eyed figurines. The old men tell of the days before Signor Mazzini and his men came and talked with the *padrone*, and the beatings stopped. The boy peers into gloomy Plumtree Court, where a few ragged children play outside their ragged school, while on one side is the rumble and thud of houses being demolished. This morning, on his board, pinioned by the spikes that prevent them tumbling off, he has images of striped and spotted *gatti*, two green and yellow *pappagalli*, Signor Napoleon standing proud, busts of Signor Shakespeare, the beautiful white Signorina Venus, piccolo Samuel. He knows that Signor Napoleon was a great French warrior, a man who stood up for peasants like his parents. Shakespeare was a great *Inglese* writer. Signora Venus was a palely-naked ancient Roman lady (he sometimes dreamed of her), and the little Samuel, who is praying, is from the bible. He's wearing tattered breeches, but his short jacket is still blue enough to make him stand out from the crowd of chestnut sellers, chair menders, lounging pickpockets waiting to snatch handkerchiefs, orange girls, "catsmeatdogsmeat!" men, broom peddlers, and loose women who blow kisses at him and smile their gap-toothed grins over their shoulders. "Buy Images!" he yells "Buy my images! Very Pretty! Very Cheap!" There is a cart unloading coal. A pig is being led, grunting, to the slaughterhouse down an alley. The street smells of horse dung, cooking from an eating-house, bread from a

baker, the stink of piss, of sweaty bodies, of smoking fires. A girl, his first customer of the day, shyly buys a little striped cat from him. He asks for twopence but she says she only has a penny. It is enough. Perhaps she will bring him good luck. "Buy images!" By Eagle and Child alley a woman stops to look at his board. She looks at a Samuel. "Leedle Sam, he pray. Very nice, very cheap!" he pleads. She snorts, turns and disappears into the crowd. Two small dirty boys try to trip him but he manages to avoid them, cursing them – "Basta!" – under his breath. They shout at him and guffaw but their voices are lost in the throng. A lady stops him. She's hurried out of Plumtree Court, past old Mother Albert, who always squats at the corner and who gives him an apple now and then. The lady looks up at his tray. "You buy?" he begs. "Very pretty! Very cheap!" "Show me that Venus," she asks. He sets his tray down on St Andrew's church wall and lifts the goddess off her spike. "Very fine!" he smiles, "Very famous!" She cradles the image, almost lovingly. He can see the desire in her eyes, and knows he has a likely sale. "Only one shilling..." he says. She frowns. "...but for you, *signora*, only sixpence!" "I'll give you tuppence for it," she says. "Oh no, lady, for such a beautiful image." He takes the statuette back, goes to replace it on its spike. "Tuppence!" "Ah lady I am a poor boy." "Tuppence and this dress." She tugs a child's dress from her belt. The boy quickly examines it...he will be able to sell it for two or three pence to a Jew in Leather Lane, and he would have sold her the Venus for tuppence if she'd begun to walk away. Anything more than a penny keeps his *padrone* in a good mood. He sighs and groans as if in pain, then..."She is yours!" He hands her the Venus and stuffs the dress into a pocket. "Lovely lady for a

lovely lady!” he grins. At this rate he will not get a beating tonight. The lady blushes, calls him a “cheeky monkey,” but her face shines with delight, and she disappears jauntily back into Plumtree Court. The boy turns and beseeches the crowd...“Buy my images!”

A tale from Plumtree Court

Richard Phelps’ old bells rang out the morning from St Andrew’s Church tower: rang across sleepy Shoe Lane, clanged along the soot-black brick walls of Plumtree Court, jolting awake a beggar curled under a sack in the doorway of the Angel Inn and launching a papery flap of pigeons. Accompanied by a chorus of a dozen snores and snuffles, the bells filtered into and ended the dreams of the O’Neil family, instigating an echoing peal of groans, coughs, whines, snuffles and scuffles as they woke.

Mary O’Neil pulled her blanket around her shoulders and shuffled, yawning, over to the fireplace in the front room, pushing aside the cat with her foot and poking the faint glow in the range until a flame appeared. She held a taper into the grate, and straightening up, lit the candle on the chimney-piece. Mary crossed herself as she glanced at the crucifix, the flickering candle flame seemingly making the plaster cat come to life. She touched the head of the nodder for luck, and it nodded approval. As she returned with the candle to the back room, her shadow danced across the tumbled beds of her family, whose tousled heads were beginning to emerge reluctantly from a patchwork of blankets and coats. “Take the pots out Connor,” she ordered the nearest

wriggling hump of blanket. “And Maeve, water!” Connor, knowing better than to argue at this fragile hour, stepped into his clogs, grimaced as he gingerly took up the two chamber pots, shouldered open the door and rattled across the creaking landing and down the stairs. He shuddered as he encountered the frosty morning air and almost-darkness, and his feet rang on the cobblestones, the contents of the pots steaming as he poured them into the sewer that already ran strong and rank down the middle of the lane. Maeve ran past on her way to the pump, swinging the empty kettle to cheer herself in the gloom. The first of the milk maids could be heard somewhere crying “Mio!” and a dog barked at a wagon clattering past the end of the lane on its way to Farringdon market. Back upstairs, Liam groaned as he eased himself out from the warmth of the bed. It was a groan that reminded everyone that he had work to do, hard work...demolishing the old houses on Holborn, just around the corner. It was a groan that announced aching muscles but also pride in bringing home money. Though the sky was only just beginning to lighten, Liam could hear the rattling hobnails of his fellow labourers as they began to arrive along Shoe Lane and Farringdon Road and knew he had to hurry to join them. He would snatch breakfast from a street vendor on the way: the hot green peas man was already shouting “All hot! All hot!” in the distance.

By the time Maeve had returned with a kettle-full of water, and it had boiled on the stove-top, grey daylight was beginning to creep into the court. On the other side of the alley, men were swinging sledgehammers and cursing as they

demolished houses Mary had known since she'd been a girl. There was the rumble of dusty bricks as another wall tumbled. You could see the sky for the first time from the front window. She sighed. Another day. Ciara would look after the three young ones until the ragged school started, then she, Aiden, Saoirse and Sean would start on the heap of clothes in the corner that were waiting to be mended.

She always kept a few pennies hidden beneath the plaster cat at the end of the mantelpiece – if she turned it to face the wall it was a signal to Liam that money was to be found there. Liam was a good man. He came home loudly drunk every Friday, but he still managed to hand over most of his earnings. This didn't mean, however, that Mary hadn't hidden some savings beneath that loose floorboard under their bed.

The morning sounds of Shoe Lane were filtering into the court. It was already buzzing with the cries of various hawkers. "Listen out for the coal man," she told her brood, who were sitting at the table chewing bread and dripping, the cat winding its way hopefully around their feet. "And I'll need potatoes and a cabbage." Children's voices, the sounds of play and mischief, drifted up from the Court. "Time for school you three!" Each child extricated a precious borrowed book from various rumpled beds and lined up to have shoes buttoned and clothing adjusted, before tumbling out on the landing and down the stairs.

Sitting in front of the hearth, Mary gazed around her at her world. Despite the weak wintery light coming in from outside, the mantelpiece glowed. She was especially fond of her bright green parrot, which was just a bit bigger than Mrs Wilson's next door and only had one chip on its beak. And no-one else in the court had such fine fruit bowls as hers. She did, however, envy Nancy Coles upstairs her Venus. Perhaps when the image boy came around next she'd pluck up courage and see how much she could bargain with him for a nice Venus, perhaps one with a few clothes to ensure her modesty! It was good for the children to see what beautiful things they made in ancient times. Like those statues she'd seen in the Egyptian Hall that time she and Liam had walked all the way to Piccadilly when they were courting.

Having two rooms, and the money to rent them, was fine for a family. The wallpaper was peeling a little, especially where the damp came through the walls, but she'd covered the gaps with pictures from old calendars. Plumtree Court was better than some of the alleys and lanes around here. The houses were worn out; Mary had been told that the Fire of London never reached this far, so they were over 200 years old, and many of them were crumbling away. Before they began knocking them down, she had known a fair few neighbours, respectable folk: bookbinders, bakers, butchers, people who worked at Pontifex's, the brass foundry in Shoe Lane. It was noisy when the inns were busy, and a few women of ill repute would linger in the shadows. But the ragged school was almost next door, and it wasn't too far to go to mass at St Anselm's. Before her neighbours began moving out, she would

stand or sit at the front door, mending clothes and gossiping.

On the mantelpiece, the head of the nodder moved cheerfully in the heat rising from the stove, where the kettle steamed. Mary wished she had more space to show off her knick-knacks. She'd bought them over the years and each one was associated with a pleasant memory. The big cat had been the first. He'd cost a penny, not long after she and Liam were married. She'd had to pawn him and the others regularly in those first difficult years, but always managed to redeem him. The white chip on his nose was the result of the only time that Liam had become violent, and had swept everything from the mantelpiece in a drunken rage. He was so horrified by what he'd done that he bought the nodding cat as a present the very next day, while his head still ached. Mary could probably have easily replaced the cat, but she liked to think of it as a reminder to her husband.

She'd met an Italian image-boy one evening in Leather Lane about ten years ago, and he'd persuaded her to buy the parrot – “my lasta h'ime signorina!” He had such big beseeching eyes, and brown skin, and she'd heard of the awful lives the little boys led up in Saffron Hill, so the tuppence seemed to hand itself over, and she didn't mind that as soon as she turned away clutching her purchase the boy instantly produced another “lasta h'ime” from a pocket. The parrot's chipped beak was a memory of her first-born, who had climbed up on a chair to reach, and drop, the figure. She'd been more frightened of him setting light to himself than the damage he'd caused

the ornament, so her explosion of anger was enough to terrify the poor wight, and no-one else has ever touched her images since! The two corn dollies, which she'd bought for a farthing from Mother Albert, were a link to her Irish parents and the first few years of her life, which were spent on a tiny farm in Donegal. Her father would bring a bunch of the last corn of each harvest back to her grandfather, who despite being blind, would weave it into a doll and hang it on a nail well out of her reach. There, he would tell her, the spirit of the corn would rest in the knot until the next year's seeds were sown, when they would plough the doll into the stony soil.

Mary remembered her few school years with affection. She loved history, and the stories she heard and read about the ancient Greeks and Romans, read to them by nuns whose eyes would become dreamy as they spoke of faraway treasures. A little frightened by what she felt was the immodesty of so many of the plaster statues the Italians hawked around the streets she had so far limited herself to the urn, which she would imagine had come from some ancient temple and contained at least the spirit of those far off exotic times. And then there were her two lovely bowls of fruit, admired by every visitor, fruits of all colours, nonsense fruits she would never taste, but which seemed to her to represent the finer things in life.

And yesterday that nice Mr Godwin had knocked on the door and asked if he could pay a quick visit. He'd tut-tutted a little over her telling him that they slept in just four beds (she smiled to herself) so in innocent revenge she'd got

a little carried away and told him that next door there were forty people in just one house (instead of just twenty). Mr. Godwin had turned to the other nice man, she didn't remember his name, and exclaimed "Quite monstrous!" and had written a line in the little book he was carrying. The other nice man had looked around and said "What a lovely collection of bric-a-brac you have on your chimney-piece Mrs O'Neil!" "Oh I do love a nice bit of art, sir" Mary had replied. "Indeed, indeed!" Mr Godwin had said, and turning to his companion, asked: "Will you make a quick sketch of Mrs O'Neil's barbarities, please?" "I'm going to put your chimney-piece in my journal Mrs O'Neil," he explained to Mary. She wasn't quite sure what he meant by barbarities, but was flattered that her home was going to be famous. "Well, I do declare!" she declared. "I'm honoured to be sure, sir, though you'll find much better mantels around the courts here. Mrs Coles upstairs not only has a nice Shakespeare done in all natural colours and also a Venus with no clothes on...it's art of course. And Mrs Flynn, next-door-but-one, her late husband was a seaman, she has two lovely parrots, all yellow and red. And you ought to see Mrs Arthur's two little plaster boys, nicely bronzed, reading and writing. Beautiful they is!" "Indeed Mrs O'Neil, and thank you, but we have to be off to visit the more distant of your neighbours, and in truth, madam, nowhere else have we seen such splendid bowls of fruit!"

Mary smiled to herself. The cries of a knife sharpener and someone selling pins could be heard in the Court. Old Mother Albert would already be squatting at her corner, opposite the Plum Tree Inn, with her basket and her

clay pipe, croaking “Apples!” All Holborn seemed to be vibrating: in the background was the rumble of carts on Farringdon Road, the thud of demolition, the rattle of construction on High Holborn, the shouts of workmen. Then she hears the distant piping voice of a boy yelling “Buy my images! Vera pretty, vera sheep!” “Venus!” she thinks, and lifting the big cat on the mantelpiece, she retrieves a penny and two halfpennies from beneath it. “What if the image-seller wanted more than tuppence,” she hesitated. Looking around the room she remembered a dress that Maeve had grown out that she’d been keeping to sell to the sad old Jew second-hand-clothes man next time he came around. Clutching the little dress and the three coins she hurried downstairs and out into the Court, turning left towards the siren call of the little boy: “Buy my images!”

Afterword

When I was a small boy, my working-class maternal grandmother, born in 1900 London, so just a Victorian, would proudly refer to her collection of small decorative objects in her Brentford accent as her “*objidaa*.” It wasn’t until I was well into this project that I realised that she was talking about her *objets d’art*.

“Images! Images!”

They gleam pure and white in the clear sunlight. They are radiant with beauty, though of frail and common material.

(C.F.O. 1852)

OBJECTS OF DELIGHT

RALPH MILLS

PART TWO:

APPENDICES and REFERENCES

An investigation of miniaturisation focusing on nineteenth century mass-produced miniature objects in working class contexts.

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APPENDIX I

I FOR IMAGES: THE IMAGE SELLER IN IMAGES

Introduction:

This section consists of a gallery of contemporary visualisations of image-sellers and their wares, which range from crude woodcuts to photographic postcards, including paintings, drawings and newspaper illustrations, and range in date from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth. The gallery is intended to be actively used as a reference source to accompany and build on the text of the thesis, and is presented in roughly chronological order. It can of course be browsed without reference to the text. This is the first time images of image-sellers and their wares have been collected together to allow comparison and identification.

The illustrations are a mixture of reproductions of high-resolution originals (a minority), a few scanned from publications, and digital images captured from web sites and other online sources. Some of the latter are of poor original quality, and the scans from books have obviously originally been screened for printing. Some have been trimmed of excess material (frames, mattes etc.).

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Pueppchen Verkauf: 14th century

Figure A1.1: *Pueppchen Verkauf* (A figurine seller), 1445. From an altarpiece. (Landschaftsmuseum)

http://www.landschaftsmuseum.de/Bilder/Pueppchen_Verkauf-2.jpg

This very early image is included as an example of the apparent continuity of miniature figures (*see also Section 2, page 76*). The objects for sale on the shop counter in this illustrated fifteenth-century German altarpiece appear to be religious subjects, though their detail is hard to distinguish.

Mijn beelden te verkoopen: eighteenth century



Ik kom uit 't verre land,
 De schaarsheld doet mij loopen,
 Om met mijs goeie verstand,
 Mijs beelden te verkoopen.

Figure A1.2: "Mijn beelden te verkoopen!" ("Buy my images!") Eighteenth century, Netherlands (van Gennep 1911, 45).

Van Gennep, A. (1911) *Remarques sur'imagerie populaire. Revue d'ethnographie et de sociologie*, 2, pp 26-50.

The mostly undecipherable verse below this early woodcut ends with the appeal: "Buy my images." It is significant that the Dutch used their equivalent word for "images" to describe figurines.

Gipsfiguren Verkäufer: c1792

Figure A1.3a: *Gips figuren Verkäufer*, after 1792. (Beall 1975)

A coloured version of this illustration in the Sammlung Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte, Berlin, is dated 1792. The tray includes a Townley Venus, a head of Apollo, four “bow pots,” an unpainted cat and dog, a small urn, a possible Homer, a bull and a Hercules.¹

¹ A “bow pot,” a corruption of “bouquet,” was a small pot containing artificial flowers.

Figure A1.3b: Coloured version of Figure A1.3a, 1792 (detail)

<http://english18thcenturyportraitsculpture.blogspot.co.uk/2016/09/plaster-casts-for-sale.html>

Gipsbilder: 1797-8

Figure A1.4: Gipsbilder! 1797-8. (Beall 1975)

In the corner of a German print of street “Cries” I found this tiny image-seller, shouting “plaster images!” It is almost impossible to tell what he is carrying on his head, but we can see a mixture of figurines and busts. Etching from *Nurnbergischer Ausruff* (Nurnburg Germanisches Nationalmuseum).

The Image Seller: 1799

Figure A1.5a: *The Image Seller*, Thomas Rowlandson, ca 1799. (Victoria and Albert museum).

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121800/an-image-seller-watercolour-thomas-rowlandson/>

One of the earliest British representations of an image seller and his wares exists in two versions, one painted in c. 1799 by the great caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson and the second by him or a follower (Figures A1.5a and A1.5b) around the same time.

In Reynolds' caricature can be seen, at the front of his tray, two cats, one of which is seated in an upright position almost exactly matching that on the Plumtree Court mantelpiece. The vendor holds out a bust that may be of George III to an enthusiastic elderly lady and a plump child together with a rather bemused man, who nevertheless has his hand in his pocket, perhaps to extract a coin. It is likely that other busts on the tray would be recognisable to a contemporary viewer. As well as a horse, the tray in Figure A1.5a also includes what appear to be two miniature obelisks. The vendor's shirt is undone almost to his navel, exposing his chest, a typical Rowlandson-ish knowing sideways glance, while in the background a young woman peers into a peep show or "raree box."²

The second version of the caricature, perhaps a copied or pirated version, differs from the first in that the horn player in the background now has his instrument upright, a flag has appeared, as has a dog, barking at the hubbub. The peep show has been simplified. The horse and several other mysterious objects have disappeared from the image-seller's board and though there is still the suggestion of buildings in the background, shadowy figures have vanished.

² See an almost identical "show box" on the Fairs are Fun web site <http://www.fairsarefun.net/html/picture.aspx?id=45&f=41,42,45,127,39,4> and several examples illustrated in the blog entry London Lore at Dennis Severs' House <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2013/06/05/london-lore-at-dennis-severs-house/>

Figure A1.5b: *The Image Seller*, Thomas Rowlandson or follower, ca 1799.

<http://english18thcenturyportraitsculpture.blogspot.co.uk/2016/09/plaster-casts-for-sale.html>

Image seller: probably late eighteenth century



Figure A1.6: Early woodcut of “image seller” (Bewick nd.; Pearson 1890, 104)

Bewick’s woodcut (Figure A1.6) places a young image-seller hawking his wares outside a rural smithy. Two cats and a parrot are visible in the centre of the boy’s board, as well as an unidentified bust and the cat in vendor’s hand. On the left side is a bollard.³ Thomas Bewick was creating most of his woodcuts towards the end of the eighteenth century, so it may be concluded from this, and the costumes of the two boys, that the image dates from that century.

³ Bollards may have a hidden meaning. See Section 10, page 413.

Images. Very Pretty! Very Fine! 1804

Figure A1.7: *"Images. Very Pretty! Very Fine!"* (Harris 1804, 28)

A cat and a parrot are also present amongst the figures on J. Harris' vendor's board (Figure A1.7). Two little girls are leaving with another cat and parrot. Illustrating Harris' book of *Cries of London*, the image was accompanied by an informative verse:

ITALIA's sun-burnt native here

Does to your view display

His curious imitative ware,

With gold and colours gay.

The cat and parrot here he shows,

The poet and the priest,

With soldiers, sailors, belles and beaus,

And many a nameless beast.

Edward and Tommy gazing stand,

And each the show admires;

While puss is borne on Kitty's hand,

And Jane her bird admires.

(Harris 1804, 28)

While the cats and (gaily-coloured) parrots are obvious, I suggest that the poet is Milton, who was often depicted with long hair. The priest could be the same individual as one of the figures in Rowlandson's caricature. A possible Napoleon is also visible. The seller is resting his tray/board on a post. A post or bollard is present in a number of illustrations, even, significantly, if it is not being utilised.⁴ The author pokes fun at the crudity of some of the casts ("many a nameless beast").

⁴ Bollards may have a hidden meaning. See Section 10, page 413.

Zierreien koof: 1808

Figure A1.8: *Zierreien koof* (Knick-knack seller). 1808. (Beall 1975, 73).

The image-seller in this Dutch illustration has both a fine cat and a parrot. His tray includes a cow, a “bow pot,” an urn and a bust of a child. The bust is likely that of Napoleon Bonaparte.

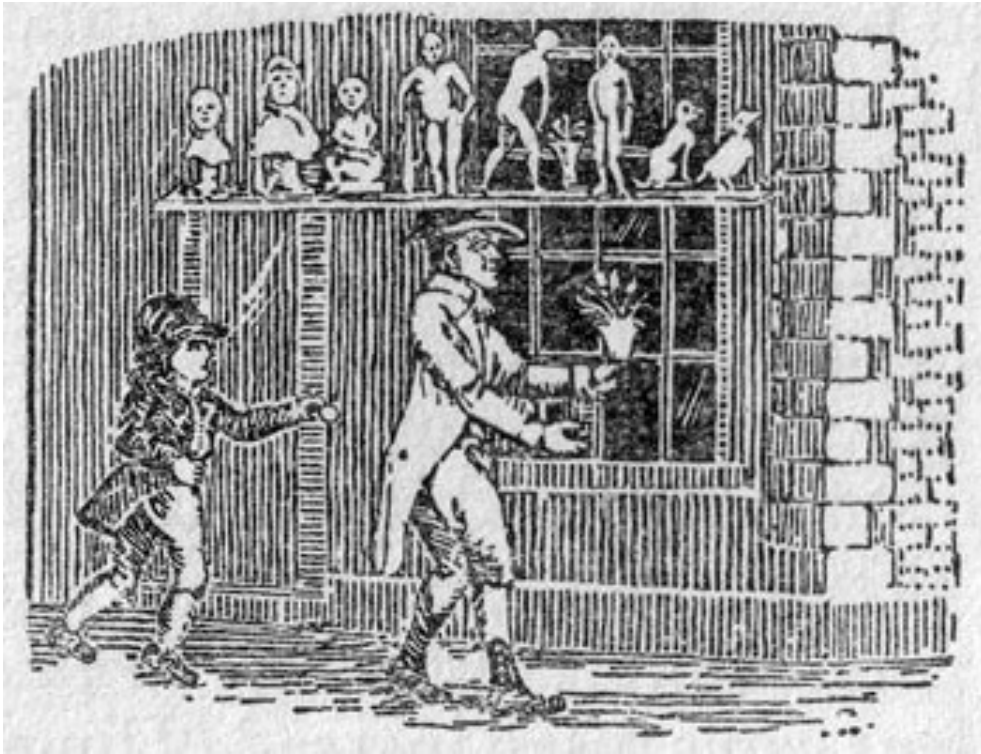
Images, very fine, very pretty: 1808

Figure A1.9: "Images, very fine, very pretty." 1808. *Cries of New York*.

The anonymous writer (perhaps S Wood) of *Cries of New York*, a small volume for children that has been described as the "first distinctly American picture book" included a woodcut of an image seller (Figure A1.9).

Although the accompanying text in *Cries of New York* restricts "images" to representations of animals, the woodcut shows a good selection of human or godly figurines, including a couple of busts and several "classical" characters, including a Hercules, with only a cat and a duck representing non-humans. The seller, who is balancing his board on his hat, no-hands, and is holding a bow-pot, appears to be about to make a sale, as a boy is approaching, coin in hand.

“This man, although his business is not so useful or necessary as some others, yet strives to please by presenting a variety of images, or representations of animals, which he carried around to sell. This is his way to get a living. They are made of plaster of Paris, which is a kind of stone that abounds at Nova-Scotia” (Wood? 1808, p 37).⁵

Images, very fine, very pretty: 1810



Figure A1.10a: *“Images, very fine, very pretty”, 1810. From *The Uncle’s Present, a New Battledoor.**

⁵ Nova Scotia is still a significant producer of gypsum, the raw material of plaster-of-Paris.

An indication that these peddlers and their cries were familiar to the average early-nineteenth-century child is that an image seller illustrated the letter *I* in *The Uncle's Present, a New Battledoor*, published in Philadelphia in about 1810 (Figure A1.10a). It has been suggested that this image was based on an earlier woodcut by Thomas Bewick (Figure A1.6), but the tray in this illustration is edged. A "battledoor" was a chapbook shaped like (and could be used as) a bat. The seller of "Images, very fine very pretty" carries his stock on a board edged with a strung barrier to prevent them sliding off, and significantly the figurines include a cat.⁶ The image seller is carrying a bust, that is unidentifiable, but his board includes a cat, a dog, a Townley Venus and a *Gladiator*) is unidentifiable. His dress, like that of the seller and boy in Figure A1.6, is of the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth century. Note his wide-brimmed hat. The illustration was, it appears, later crudely copied (Figure A1.10b) in another childrens' publication.



Figure A1.10b: (Copy of?) *Images* c1810

⁶ See also Figures A1.41, A1.42, A1.48, A1.51, A1. 63, A1.70, A1.74, A1.78 and A1.92.

I for Italian: 1810**Figure A1.11a: *Fine images* 1810-1817.****Figure A1.11b: *Italian* 1810-1817.**

(Gittleman and Pingree 2003, xxvi)

In these two uses of the same woodcut in early nineteenth-century children's alphabets, the Italian (I for Italian, and images) is shown offering a bust, while his board includes a lion, a bird, another bust and a figure sitting on a bench (?). The figure with the raised arm could be Zeus, Hermes or Dionysus. The caption of Figure A11a is somewhat dismissive of the Italian's profession. "Fine images" probably reflects the image-seller's street cry.

Eine gipsgeisser: 1810

Figure A1.12: *Ein Gipsgiesser, 1810*. (Beall 1975, 57).

This German image-seller, depicted in a rural scene, holds two casts that are hardly miniatures! The head appears to be that of Apollo. The child clutching a bird I have yet to identify.

Buy images! Good and cheap! Probably late eighteenth century



Figure A1.13: Buy images! Good and cheap! Images, very good—very cheap! (Enlarged. Undated but probably pre 1810). Thomas Bewick. (Hindley 1881, 287).

Bewick's woodcut, entitled *Buy images! Good and cheap! Images, very good—very cheap!*, was taken from a collection of late eighteenth or early nineteenth century "Cries", probably based on those heard in Newcastle, by Charles Hindley in 1881 and included in his anthology *A History of the Cries of London, Ancient and Modern*.⁷ It is accompanied by a short verse:

BUY MY IMAGES, IMAGES

Come buy my image earthenware,

Your mantel pieces to bedeck,

Examine them with greatest care,

You will not find a single speck.

⁷ Hindley includes a second image seller later in his collection, but it is not clear whether this is by Bewick, and is again undated. It is included for reference as Figure A1.85, later in this appendix.

Bewick's woodcut is tiny, but it is possible to make out two cats, a bird, an urn and two busts (plus a third that the seller is carrying). The two triangular objects are mysterious. They may be miniature obelisks (copied perhaps from Meissen originals), but might be church spires from the image background. Similar objects also appear in Rowlandson's illustration (Figure A1.5a above). The seller is definitely a child and may be wearing a padded hat to ease the weight on his head.

Jean Point-d'Argent: 1813

Figure A1.14: *Jean point d'Argent wil graag verkoopen, En moet om geld met Beelden loopen.* (before 1813). (Beall 1975, 409).

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search/objects?q=verkoper+van+beelden&p=7&ps=12&st=OBJECTS&ii=2#/RP-P-1923-280,74>

The Dutch "beelden" can translate directly as "images." The verse in Old Dutch is difficult to translate literally but tells of Jean, wandering about wanting money for the images he sells.

The figures are mostly unidentifiable, but include a possible Shakespeare.

Very Fine, Very Cheap: 1815

Figure A1.15: "Very Fine, Very Cheap", etching by John Thomas Smith, 1815. (London: National Portrait Gallery)

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw201568/Unknown-man-selling-plaster-figures-Very-Fine-Very-Cheap?LinkID=mp04155&search=sas&sText=John+Thomas+Smith&role=art&wPage=1&rNo=28>

The most prominent and easily-identifiable figure on the image-seller's tray in John Thomas Smith's etching (Figure A1.15) is that of Napoleon, who stands diminutive and isolated in the centre of the board. At the time of Smith's work Napoleon had just been defeated at the battle of Waterloo, so it is tempting to identify the hawk nose on the much larger bust to Napoleon's left and that cradled in the seller's arm as the triumphant Wellington. Two birds and a sheep share the board with a pagoda (a pagoda had been erected in St James' Park as part of the 1814 peace celebrations), an urn, a Hercules, a Mars and several other unidentified busts. The image seller wears a padded hat, similar versions of which appear in other illustrations. The etching was included in the posthumous publication *A Book for a Rainy Day* (p 63). Smith also included a second image vendor in the 1815 set of etchings. In this illustration the hawker proudly displays a fine figurine of Mr. Punch, while resting his other hand on a bust of Homer. His wares also include a bust of Mars and a horse. (Figure A1.16).

Figure A1.16: Untitled etching 1815. John Thomas Smith (London: National Portrait Gallery)

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw201563/Unknown-man-selling->

An Italian plaster of Paris figurine seller: before 1817

Figure A1.17: A Tyrolean, a housekeeper and an Italian plaster of Paris figurine seller, Josef Eder, 1805-1817. (Beall 1975).

The image-seller is carrying a figurine of the Venus de Medici, and amongst the figures and busts on his crowded board is a parrot, a possible Bonaparte, a dog and a grimacing classical face.

Image Seller: 1818

Figure A1.18: *The Image Seller 1780-1818*. John Augustus Atkinson. Victoria and Albert Museum.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1259225/the-image-seller-watercolour-atkinson-john-augustus/>

Painted before 1818, John Atkinson's *Image Seller* (Figure A1.18) is dressed in clothing that looks to the eighteenth century. Note the parrot and the cat, which are comparable with the same animals on the Godwin chimney-piece. A figure of Caesar and a "Bow pot" may also be present. To the right of the tray is what appears to be a crouching or cross-legged figure. This character, perhaps a Buddha, appears on mantelpieces in several Rowlandson cartoons and other illustrations of the period.

Marchand de figures de plâtre: 1816

Figure A1.19a: *Marchand de figures de plâtre* (Seller of plaster figurines), after 1816. Carle Vernet (Paris Musees).⁸

<http://parismuseescollections.paris.fr/fr/musee-carnavalet/oeuvres/marchand-de-figures-de-platre-57>

⁸ French painter, 1758-1836.

Carle Vernet recorded a seller of plaster-of-Paris figures (Figure A1.19) in France. On the dark-skinned vendor's board (Figure A1.19b), which includes both painted and white figures, Vernet has included a nodder (an animal whose head bobs up and down, far left), three green birds, presumably parrots, several Napoleon-like figures (he was an admirer of Napoleon) and a cockerel. Note also the spikes that held the figures in place, and the pad on which the seller rests his board. The parrots sit on orbs very much like the Plumtree Court example.

Figure A1.19b: *Marchand de figures de plâtre* (detail).

Images: 1820

In keeping with Thomas Rowlandson's tongue-in-cheek and unforgiving portraits of London's "Lower Orders", the potential customer of his 1820 *Images* (Figure A1.20) peers lasciviously at the *Venus de Medici* he is being offered, while his young companion, who carries a portfolio under his arm, seems to be more appreciative of its artistic qualities. The slight eroticism of the image is echoed by the scandalously close encounter of the couple in the background. Rowlandson depicts the image seller as a young and handsome man, his trousers tight, his hose clinging to shapely calves, the neck of his shirt undone. It's not clear

whether the urn in the niche behind him is part of his stock. The figure on horseback may be Napoleon.

Figure A1.20: *Images 1820*. Rowlandson (*Rowlandson's Characteristic Sketches of the Lower Orders*, British Library).

<http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/rowlandsons-characteristic-sketches-of-the-lower-orders>

Buy Image: c 1825

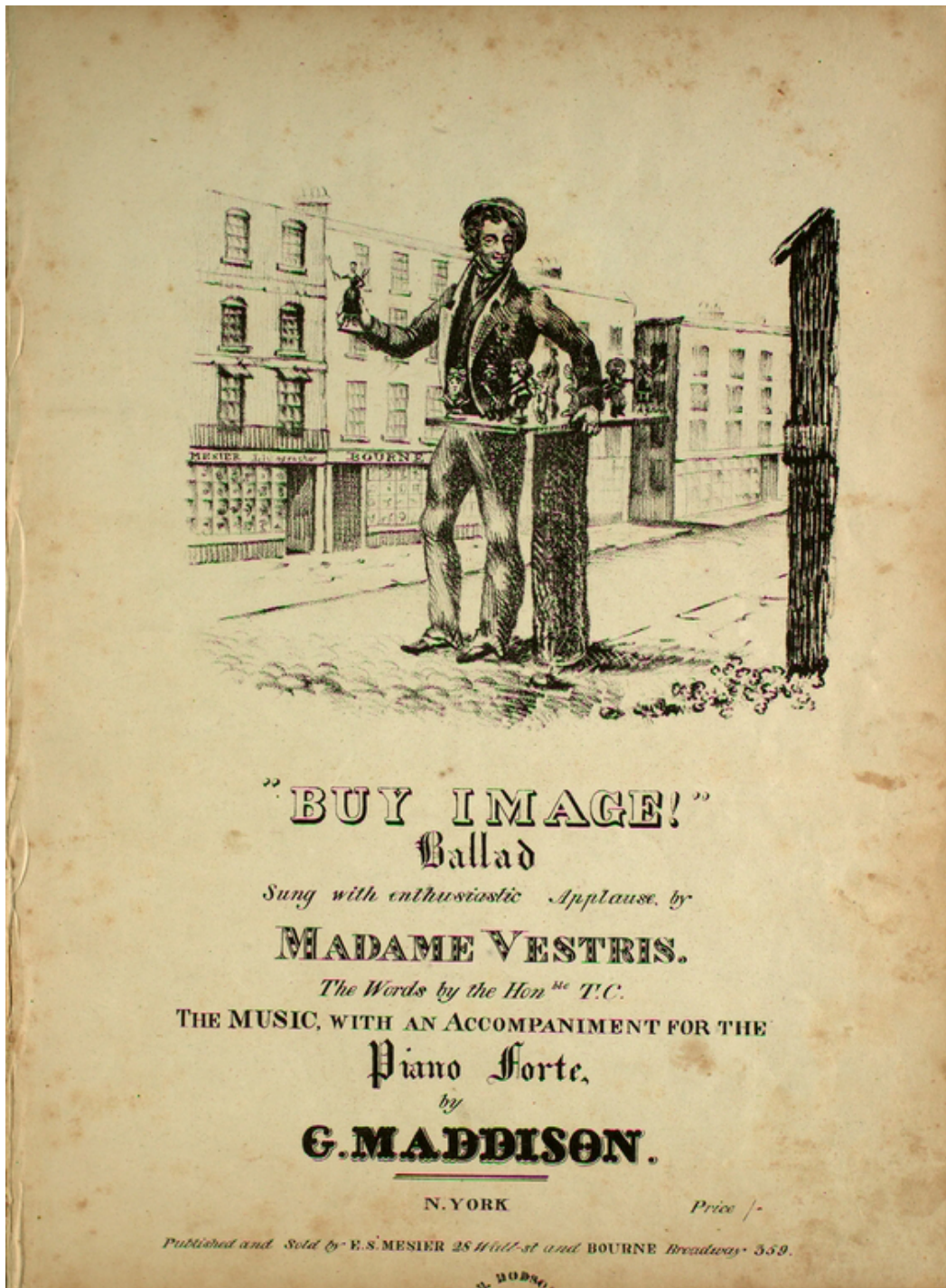


Figure A1.21: Cover of sheet music for song *Buy Image!* Courtesy of the Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music, The Sheridan Libraries, The Johns Hopkins University.

For an analysis and discussion of this ballad, see Section 9, page 263.

Gipswaarenhandler: 1820

Figure A1.22: Gipswaarenhandler (Plaster goods dealer) 1820. (Beall 1975, 78).

The image seller in Figure A1.22, recorded in Germany, wears eighteenth- rather than nineteenth-century clothing. His tray, however, displays a typical assortment of figures, including, of course, a cat and two parrots, an urn, a “bow pot”, an eagle and a bust that could be Homer.

Come, buy my images!: 1830

A small children's volume, *A Pretty Picture-Book*, published by the American Tract Society in c1830, included a woodcut of image sellers (Figure A1.23) to warn against idolatry – it insists that the objects should only be used as mantelpiece ornaments, not worshipped. Both image-sellers appear to have removed their hats. The boys' wares include three unidentifiable busts, a horse, two lounging or seated figures and a bird. A bollard is present.

⁹ A later edition of the book has the same text but attaches a higher quality image (Figure A1.24). In this the figures are more clearly drawn, but are still generalised – two birds, two busts, a standing figure that is probably Hercules and a horse. The seller is wearing a characteristic padded hat.

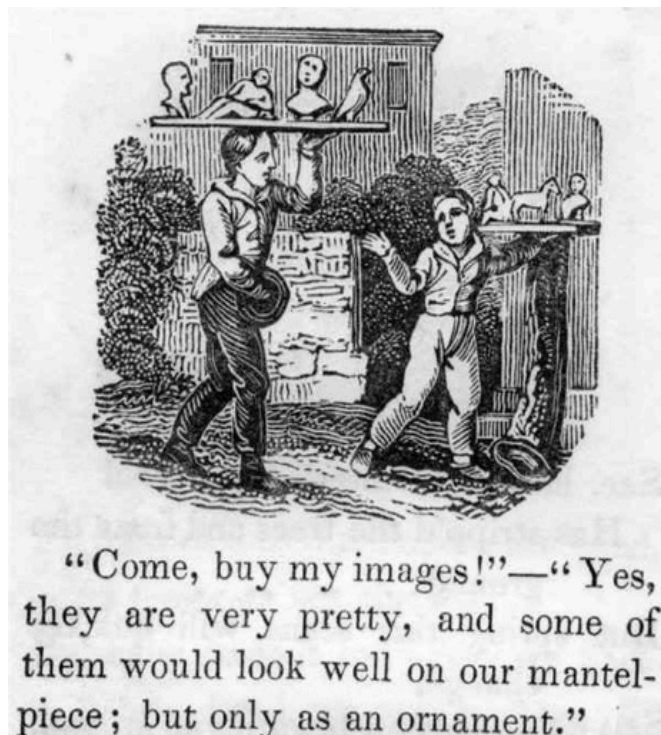


Figure A1.23: Come buy my images, c1830. *A Pretty Picture Book*.

⁹ Bollards may have a hidden meaning. See Section 10, page 413.



Figure A1.24: Image Boy illustrating a later edition of *A Pretty Picture Book* (nd).

Figures en platre: 1830

Figure A1.25: Figures en platre, 1830. (Mary Evans Picture Library).

Napoleon features at least twice in the stock-in-trade of the French image-seller of Figure A1.25. The spikes that prevent figures from sliding off his tray are clearly visible. To the right is a sitting/cross-legged character similar to that mentioned above (*see page 23*) The small child carries a portfolio, like that in the 1820 Rowlandson caricature.

Gips figure kauft: 1830

Figure A1.26: *Gips-Figure kauft!* (1830) *Berliner Ausrufer, Costume und locale Gebräuche*. Universität zu Köln

http://prometheus.uni-koeln.de/pandora/de/image/show/giessen_lri-202db348416f2f72368c0bd4b408f49f65b86ccb

Two fine parrots grace the board of this German image-seller (Figure A1.26), along with a greyhound and a *Crouching Venus*.

A la Sante de l'Ancien: 1834

Figure A1.27: *A la Sante de l'Ancien*, 1834. Jean Henri de Coene¹⁰.

http://art.rmngp.fr/fr/library/artworks/jean-henri-de-coene_a-la-sante-de-l-ancien_huile-sur-toile_1834

“A toast to the old times,” exclaims the central figure in de Coene’s 1834 painting (Figure A1.27), holding aloft a plaster figurine of Napoleon. See Section 10, page 366 for a discussion of the popularity of figurines of Napoleon.

¹⁰ Belgian painter, 1798-1866.

Plaster figures: 1835

Figure A1.28: *Söni gypsfigural!* 1835. Wien. (Beall 1975)

The image-seller in this German illustration (Figure A1.28) holds a possible Bonaparte, while his rather sparse tray includes a bow pot, a praying figure and two birds. I have yet to satisfactorily translate the cry.

Who'll buy an image? 1835



Figure A1.29: Who'll buy an image? 1835, *Bell's Life*.

Illustration from a satirical piece in the magazine *Bell's Life in London, and Sporting Chronicle* (see Appendix II below, page 174). The “image” is of the Irish politician, Daniel O'Connor.

Covent Garden: 1835

That image sellers were to be found in the streets of London, and many other cities around the world is confirmed by clues that perhaps no-one else has spotted, or of which they have not seen the significance. For example, I enthusiastically use *Twitter*, and on occasion it proves an invaluable research tool. On March 14th 2016, The Museum of London posted a tweet that celebrated one of London's first police stations, The Watch House in Covent Garden. The post consisted of a painting (Figure A1.30) by an anonymous artist described as a member of “The British School” which shows a corner of the piazza, a group of watchmen lounging in front of the Watch House, a pump and some spill-over from the market. In front of some iron railings stands an image-seller (Figure 1.30b), complete with his tray of figures, which stand out white against the background. The image seller, who appears to be young, or at least small, and is wearing a typically flat hat, which made balancing his tray on his

head, a little easier, though here he is seemingly resting it on top of a lower iron railing. The tray appears to be well loaded, with a small column and at least two figurines that look suspiciously like Napoleon, one standing and one on horseback. The market, and a well-used pump, would have been a good location for passing trade.

Figure A1.30a: The Watch House at Covent Garden (c1835) Anon. Museum of London.

<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/102213.html>

Figure A1.30b: The Watch House at Covent Garden (Detail)

THE FALL OF NAPOLEON: 1836

Figure A1.31: *The Fall of Napoleon* (George Wallis, 1836). Wolverhampton Art Gallery

http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/collections/getrecord/WAGMU_OP486

George Wallis' painting *The Fall of Napoleon* (Figure A1.31) depicts an unfortunate image seller tripping over the foot of a British sailor who is sauntering along with his hands in his

pockets, arm in arm with a black man. According to Joseph Jones, in 1897, the painting “represented an Italian, with a board full of plaster images on his head, who had tripped on the pavement. The board was upset, and the bust of Napoleon was falling to the ground. In the present day we can hardly understand the distrust and hatred of the French, which was constant and abiding, and so the fall of Napoleon, the great enemy of England, was an exciting and interesting spectacle” (Historyweb web page). Jones’ account hardly matches the abiding popularity of figurines and busts of Bonaparte.

Wallis’s painting was not highly regarded by contemporary critics. “We confess that we do not quite understand the incident that forms the subject of this print; which is, in all respects, one of very moderate pretensions” sniffed *The Literary Gazette* (1837, 419) while *The Atheneum* had “seen the same sort of thing done better before (1837, 539). *The Gentleman’s Magazine* sighed, when reviewing Zobel’s engraving from the painting: “the conceit of this design is poor, a drunken soldier on a Waterloo anniversary overthrowing an Italian image boy; the execution is merely well drawn, without any of the humour a Cruikshank would throw into a sketch of a twentieth part of this size. Why a black man should be the soldier’s comrade we do not perceive” (1837, 63-4).

The use of the figurine as a visual reference to the demise of Napoleon underlines the familiarity of these objects at the time. The painting also incidentally nicely shows the arrangement of spikes or rods on the image seller’s board. A bollard leans towards us, meaningfully, in the foreground; this might imply a sexual undertone to this painting.¹¹

¹¹ See Section 10, page 457.

Plaster figures: 1840

Figure A1.32: *Söni gypsfigura!* Wien, 1840. (Beall 1975).

Barefooted, hand in pocket, the image-seller in Figure A1.32 is yelling the same street cry in (old) German as the individual in Figure A1.28, to which it is very similar. His wares include a Bonaparte and a cow.

Buy Images: c1840

Figure A1.33: *Buy Images! Cries of London, c1840, TH Jones (Alamy)*

<http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-buy-images!-cries-of-london-c1840-artist-th-jones-60090563.html>

Taken from an arithmetic instruction book, which appears to have used random images that have little if anything to do with the subject matter, “Buy Images” (Figure A1.33) was probably re-used from some other publication. It features the image-seller brandishing Napoleon, with his tray including Hercules and Wellington. Note the prominent bollard.¹²

¹² See Section 10, page 413.

The figurine seller: 1841

Figure A1.34: *The figurine seller*, Fendi 1841

<http://artsalesindex.artinfo.com/auctions/Peter-Fendi-201802/Figurine-seller-1841>

Peter Fendi's female image-seller (Figure A1.34) is carrying out her trade door-to-door, with a basket filled with cherubs or cupids, and a large cupid or angel tucked under her arm. She doesn't appear particularly Italian, and is rather clean and neat for an itinerant peddler! This is the earliest "romanticised" image of an image-seller I've so far discovered, though it dates from well into what has been suggested was the "romantic period." Like the Wallis painting (Figure A1.31) it does demonstrate a change from the purely illustrative to a more allegorical theme.

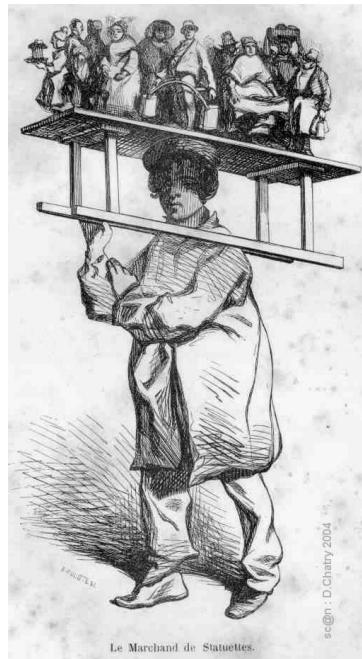
Le Marchand de Statuettes: 1842

Figure A1.35: *Le Marchand de Statuettes* 1842 (Bedolliere)

The frontispiece of Emile Bedolliere's 1842 book *Les Industriels, Metiers et Professions en France* (Workers, trades and occupations in France) was intended to introduce not the image-seller but the contents of the volume, which described various artisans, peddlers and market workers (an image-seller is, paradoxically, not included). The figurines displayed on the board of the seller in Figure A1.35 sum up the types of characters who would have populated the streets down which the seller plied his trade. They form a crowded gallery of miniatures of fellow street traders, some of whom hold the viewer in their gaze, as does the image seller himself, with a silent entreaty to "Buy! Buy!" The image seller also demonstrates the manner in which one type of tray, fitted with shoulder supports, was utilised.¹³

¹³ See also Figures A1.44, A1.64, A1.69 and A1.78.

Buy My Images: c1842

Figure A1.36a: The cover of the sheet music for the song Buy My Images. Victoria and Albert Museum.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1281776/buy-my-images-sheet-music-hudson-thomas-mr/>

For a discussion and analysis of this ballad, see Section 9, page 278.

Figure A1.36b: Detail of image-seller's tray on cover of *Buy My Images*.

The Image Seller: 1843

Muller's dramatic representation of *The Image Seller* (Figure A1.37), with the white plaster figures set in stark contrast against a deep blue sky, presents a more idealised version of the image boy's life and stock in trade. All the visible objects crowded onto his board appear to be high quality figurines of classical subjects. The urban scene in the background is a prosaic one – the painter was perhaps emphasising the contrasts between the intellectual past and the urban present. The board is foreshortened and the boy hatless, wearing the now more common short jacket without tails. The figures (Figure A1.37b) include a Townley Venus and a little boy reading (*Enfant Lisant* by Sauvage) mentioned by Hone (see page 175) as being hugely popular in 1826. Note also an urn and a Greek actor.

Figure A1.37a: *The Image Seller* 1843. William James Muller. Private Collection.

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/william-james-müller/the-plaster-figure-seller-ZisIFrMMjXxLvpeXSNUCw2>

Figure A1.37b: *The Image Seller* 1843. William James Muller (Detail).

The Image Seller: 1843

So familiar were image sellers that the satirical magazine *Punch* was able to use them as the basis of cartoons and caricatures. In 1843 it caricatured Lord Brougham as *The Image Seller*, complete with his characteristic checked trousers and a board which sported various images of himself (Figure A1.38). *Punch* was a relentless pursuer of Brougham; lawyer, parliamentarian, orator, founder member of the University of London and eccentric intellectual. This cartoon suggested that Brougham was selling himself in a variety of ways. The caption reads: “Who’ll buy! Images! Fine Images! Who’ll buy!” There is a bollard in the background.¹⁴



Figure A1.38: *The Image-Seller*, 1843. John Leech (*Punch*).

¹⁴ See Section 10, page 413.

Le Marchand de figures: 1843

Figure A1.39a: *Ombres Chinoises: marchands ambulants de Paris (1845)*.

<http://ombres-et-silhouettes.wifeo.com/les-petits-metiers.php>

Le Marchand de figures.

Marchand de figures, nous vendons l'Apollon de Belvédère, les lapins pour les petits enfants et le grand Napoléon, l'Hercule-Farnèse et des fruits en panier; achetez pour les petits enfants des perroquets tout verts qui chantent comme des rossignols. (Anon 2015c)

Figurine merchants, we sell the Apollo of Belvedere, rabbits for small children, the great Napoleon, the Farnese Hercules and fruit baskets; for small children buy green parrots that sing like nightingales.

Figure A1.39b: *Ombres Chinoises: marchands ambulants de Paris* (detail).

The image-sellers tray in this series of cut-outs intended for a shadow theatre, published in 1842 (Figure A1.39), shows a Napoleon, a Hercules and a bow pot, as well as some sort of building and a bird. Called “ombres chinoises” or Chinese Shadows, the designs often illustrated street cries. Each silhouette was designed to be cut out and mounted on a stick, to be manipulated between a lamp and a white background. Sometimes heads and limbs were printed separately to allow them to be articulated.

Figure A1.39c: Silhouette of image seller with tray and basket (c 1842). Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

The wares of the image-seller in Figure A1.39c include a deer, a horse, a building and a dog. A child appears to have bought a cat. This image may be more of an illustration than a source of cut-outs.

The image pedlar: 1844

This painting (Figure A1.40) was described at the time in *The New World* magazine of February 1844, when it was still a work in progress:

We have seen another performance of Mr Edmonds, unfinished however, which has given us a higher opinion of his acquirements, as a painter, than we had formed from seeing his past works. This is a picture somewhat in the matter of Wilkin's early domestic scenes; something between the "Blind Fiddler" and the "Village Festival." Although it is in the manner of Wilkin, it is not in imitation. The matter belongs to the artist. It represents a farmhouse kitchen. An Italian image-vender has just made his appearance, and drawn all the family together to look at his marvellous wares. The figures are all finely grouped and individualized. In one corner of the room is a very beautiful episode, such as poets and painters love to throw into their compositions; an incident which stands by itself and yet belongs to the main story. An old revolutionary soldier has taken a bust of Washington, and is explaining, to a precious little fellow in a petticoat, the story of the Hero's life. The rekindled fire of the old soldier, and the curiosity and awe of the child are exceedingly well depicted.

(Winchester 1844, 153)

Figure A1.40a: *The image pedlar*, 1844. Francis William Edmonds. (New York Historical Society).

<http://www.nyhistory.org/exhibit/image-pedlar>

Figure A1.40b: *The image pedlar*: Detail of figurines.

Figure A1.40c: *The image pedlar*: Detail of figurine of Washington.

Figure A1.40d: *The image pedlar*, Detail of figure of fruit bowl.

This painting, set in rural America, nevertheless shows links to the Old World, with Napoleon Bonaparte standing in the centre of the image-seller's board. While his attention is on showing the elderly woman a plaster bowl of brightly-coloured fruit, a little girl has spotted a plaster dog in his basket.

The Dealer in Images: 1845

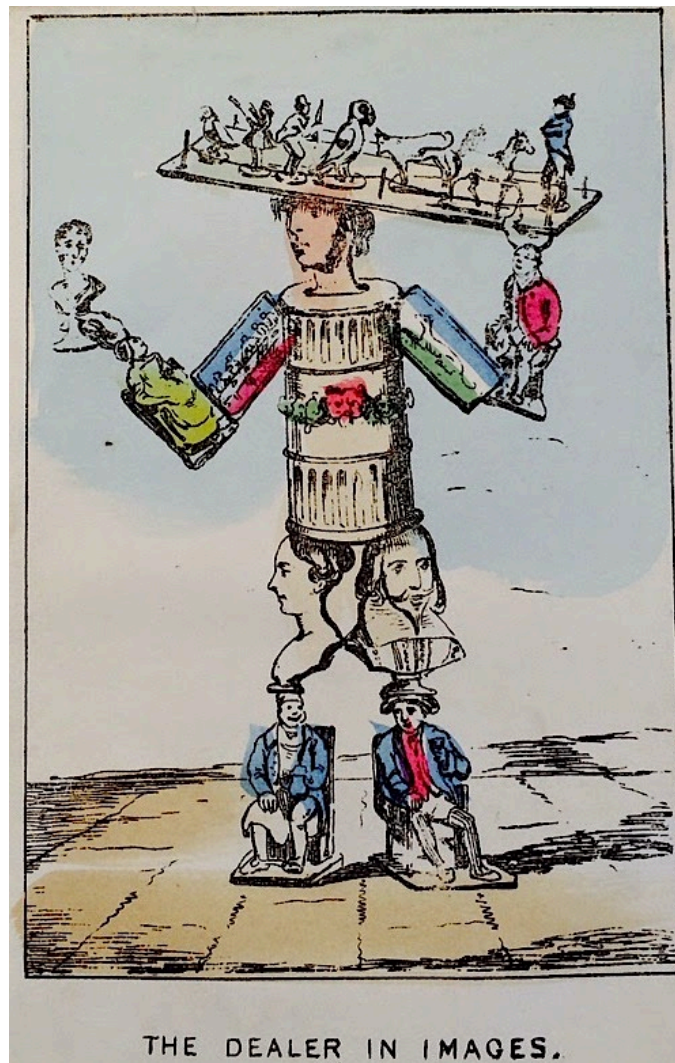


Figure A1.41: *The Dealer in Images*, from *London Cries Illustrated for the Young* p4 (Anon 1845).

The text describing fanciful *The Dealer in Images* (Figure A1.41) provides a wealth of information as to the stock-in-trade of Italian image seller in the mid 1800s:

“Poor Pedro! what a strange load he bears! He has become one mass of images from top to toe. Well may he cry “images”, in hopes that some one will ease him of his burden. They are very cheap. There is the head of Shakespeare, and of our gracious Queen; Tam o’Shanter and Souter Johnnie; Napoleon, parrots and I know not what

besides, all made out of plaster of Paris, by poor Pedro in his little attic, which serves him for bed-chamber, sitting room and workshop. Have you ever seen these poor Italians at their work? I have, and very poorly are they lodged and fed, I can assure you. One would wonder what can make them leave their sunny Italy, where fruits hang thick as leaves upon the tress, to come and toil in darkness and dirt in our narrowest streets. But I suppose they little know what London is till they are settled down with very distant prospect of return. They hear of it as famous city, paved with gold - that is the old story, you know - where every one can make his fortune; and they come to try"

The dealer's tray also includes John Liston as *Paul Pry* and Madame Vestris (in her *Buy my Brooms* role) as well as two parrots, a horse and a cow.¹⁵ The seller may be holding a bust of Wellington. His body is made from a column, versions of which are shown in other illustrations. The other images are difficult to identify, though his upper arms appear to be made of plaques or bas-reliefs, one of which could be of the last supper. The red-coated figure could be John Bull.

¹⁵ For more on Paul Pry and Madame Vestris see Section 9 p270 and Section 10, p 411.

50 kilos of celebrities on his head: 1845

**Homme aux plâtres.
50 kilos de célébrités sur
la tête.**

Figure A1.42: *Homme aux plâtres*, 1845. Hetzel *La Diable a Paris*

Figure A1.42 is an illustration from the book *The Devil in Paris and Parisians*, a searching and satirical look at nineteenth century life in Paris by Pierre-Jules Hetzel. Hercules is visible, as is Napoleon, a crouching Venus and a Homer. The unfortunate image seller is described, ironically, as carrying 50 kilograms of celebrities on his head. His tray has a barrier around its edge.¹⁶

¹⁶ See also Figures A.1.10, A1.41, A1.48, A1.51, A1.63, A1.70, A1.74, A1.78 and A1.92.

I for Italian: 1845

Figure A1.43: Letter “I” in alphabet, *Les Cris de Paris*, 1845. Bibliotheque National.

A tiny image seller represents the letter I in a French alphabet (Figure A1.43).

Le marchand de statuettes: 1845

A novella by Castellan, *Le Marchand de Statuettes* is a melodramatic and sentimental mid-century work. In three uncredited illustrations we see an image-seller first (Figure A1.44a) with a tray of difficult to identify figures. Later we see him clad in striped trousers (Figure A1.44b), and in a death scene we can see the presumably comforting presence of the

religious figures on a shelf overlooking the death bed (Figure A1.44c). The image-seller's tray has shoulder supports.¹⁷



Figure A1.44a: Illustration from *Le Marchand de Statuettes*, 1845.

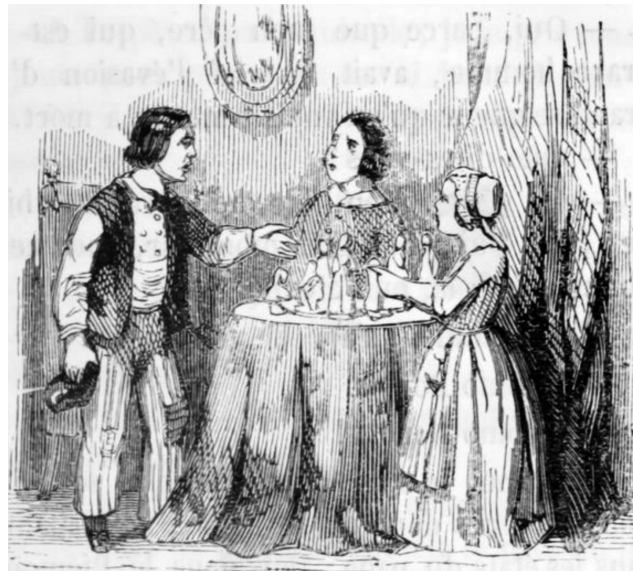


Figure A1.44b: Illustration from *Le Marchand de Statuettes*, 1845.

¹⁷ See also Figures A1.35, A1.64, A1.69 and A1.78.



Figure A1.44c: Illustration from *Le Marchand de Statuettes*, 1845.

Images, Buy Images: 1847

John Leighton's image seller in Trafalgar Square (Figure A1.45), from his illuminating, if inelegantly-titled, *The Cries of London and Public Edifices* is displaying a collection that includes a cat, a rooster and some more weighty figures. A bollard is prominent.¹⁸ Leighton's caption reads:

The dealers in these articles are mostly Italians. The class of subjects sold in the streets were formerly of common-place interest, such as a parrot, horse, cat, or cow, but our vendor has some of a higher class — the Farnese Hercules, Baily's Eve at the Fountain, Cupid and Psyche, Chantrey's bust of Sir Walter Scott, &c. See, there is a Greenwich pensioner directing the attention of a young sailor to the Nelson column: he is perhaps describing the victory of the Nile or Trafalgar. There is a student of the

¹⁸ See Section 10, page 413.

Royal Academy observing their movements, very likely to introduce the scene in his next picture.

Figure A1.45: *Images, buy images*. Image seller in Trafalgar Square 1847. (Leighton). (Internet Archive, University of Toronto Library)

<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/johnleighton/20.html>

The location of this image seller is appropriate, because E. H. Baily, who sculpted *Eve at the Fountain* in 1821, created the statue of Nelson in 1843. Francis Chantrey's bust of Sir Walter Scott dates from 1820; it appears again in Hugh Cameron's *Italian Image Seller* (Figure A1.65). Napoleon is visible in the background. The Cupid and Psyche is probably copied from the C2nd BC Greek version (Capioline Museum, Rome).

Italian Image Boys at a Roadside Alehouse: 1849

**Figure A1.46a: *Italian Image - Boys at a Roadside Alehouse*, 1849. James Collinson,
<http://www.leicestergalleries.com/19th-20th-century-paintings/d/james-collinson/12714>**

In a rather sedate public house scene, James Collinson places centrally a board of mostly unpainted figurines (Figure A1.46).¹⁹ The painting was Collinson's first "official" Pre-

¹⁹ The board was called a *galera* in Italian (Sensi-Isolani 1990)

Raphaelite Brotherhood work (Crowther 2014). A large figurine stands on the table, in danger of being knocked over by a small child, a boy in the background addresses the group, and a little girl examines a small object, while motley folk of all ages look on. Although “Home Brewed Ale” is advertised, not much drink is in evidence. The Italian boys relax to the left – it is not clear whether there are two, three or four of them. It is worth noting the wide-brimmed hat behind them. The boy standing on the chair almost in the centre of the painting may be trying to persuade the audience to buy something. There is an interesting contrast, perhaps Collinson’s intention, between the images, of celebrities, classical characters and of course Napoleon, with the ordinariness of the context.

Of Collinson’s painting, the *Art Journal* wrote: “This composition is crowded with figures of whom those of the Italian boys are the least conspicuous. The circle comprehends persons of all ages, busily canvassing Pio Nono, Joan d’Arc, Cupid and Psyche, Napoleon, and perhaps Richard Cobden. The scene is rendered with much spirit and the characters individually with becoming truth” (1849, p 170). The board (Figure A1.46b) also includes a large urn. A tray of medallions is visible on the table.

Figure A1.46b: *Italian Image - Boys at a Roadside Alehouse (detail)*.

Figurine seller: 1849

Figure A1.47: *Figurine seller*, Murzhinsky, 1849. National Gallery of Warsaw

The board of the image seller in this Polish painting (Figure A1.47) by Antony Murzhinsky, includes two Prussian soldiers and a Homer. The potential customer is closely examining a Venus de Medici which appears to have been made in mirror-image. Note the seller's flat cap. The elderly man is perhaps a veteran of the Polish-Russian war of 1792, regarding the military figures nostalgically (Andina 2016, pers comm)

The image-seller: 1850

The verse below Figure A1.48 relates that the image seller comes to the Netherlands from the fertile plains of the Arno River in the Apennines to sell his cheap, beautiful and lifelike “gallery” of wares, which include an owl and a baboon. We also see a rabbit, Napoleon, a parrot and at least two cats. Note the presence of bollards.²⁰ The image-seller’s tray has a barrier around its edge.²¹

The image-seller comes from a beautiful region of Italy.

From across the Apennines and the fruitful plains of the River Arno,

Bringing his merchandise to our country.

You can see his small gallery on his tray.

His images are very beautiful and life-like, of course,

And he tells you that he wants to sell them to you very cheap.

You can see the peaceful cat and owl and baboon

And other figurines standing next to one another.

[my translation]

²⁰ See Section 10, page 413.

²¹ ²¹ See also Figures A.1.10, A1.42, A1.51, A1. 63, A1.70, A1.74, A1.78 and A1.92.

Figure A1.48: *De Beeldjes-koop* (The Image-seller), 1850. (Rijksmuseum).

(Beall 1975, 431)

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search/objects?q=straat+verkoper&s=chronologic&p=11&ps=12&st=OBJECTS&ii=4#/R-P-P-OB-206.240,121>

Manden med Gipsfigurerne: 1840-50

Figure A1.49: *Manden med Gipsfigurerne*, 1840-50, Klastrup, Kopenhagener Kafrufe. (Beall 1975, 39)

<https://bibliotek.kk.dk/biblioteker/raadhusbiblioteket/blog/forsvundne-kjoebenhavn-motiver>

An image-seller in Copenhagen (Figure A1.49) raises his tray of figurines for all to see. In P. Klastrup's drawing I can make out an *enfant lisant*, an eagle, and a couple of Napoleons. The central bust may be King Frederick VI, who possessed a prominent chin.

The *Spydpigen* blog writes:

In 1800s Copenhagen you would hear Italians selling plaster images in the street, as we see here in a drawing by Klæstrup. Napoleon Bonaparte was very popular, although Frederik VI had sat on the wrong horse and had led the country into national bankruptcy in 1813. It took the country a few decades to recover, and Norway went its own way (Spydpigen blog 2014).

“Schöne figuri kauft²²!”

Shouts the plaster sculpture man,

For he comes from a foreign country.

On hearing this, Karl runs to his father,

“Dear Papa! Buy me a bird,

He has lots and they are so beautiful,

Or another pretty plaster doll.

I wish I could have the one of our king!

He could stand on the cabinet

Beside our blessed king;

Yes, that would be gorgeous, I would really like that.

Oh, can you see him with his little hat²³,

He who was exiled on the island,

Separated from everything that was dear to him.

Owning Napoleon would be probably worthwhile.

Look at the cat with the nodding head!

²² German: “Buy beautiful figures!”

²³ Napoleon’s “little hat” became symbolic of the Emperor.

*Everything that the man has is so beautiful,
Buy something small for me, oh sweet Papa! "*

*"The cat with the nodding head,
I'll buy for your little sister,
You can have a bust of our king,
That will be displayed on our cabinet."*

[My translation, with assistance from Dorte Kjaerulff]

The enthusiasm shown for Napoleon in this verse is either tongue in cheek or based on a common attitude held by many in the nineteenth century. King Frederick VI of Denmark supported Napoleon Bonaparte, which led to him having to cede Norway to Sweden in the Peace of Kiel in 1814.

Girl with a chalkware toy: 1850

Figure A1.50: *Girl with a chalkware toy in the form of a Staffordshire Cavalier King Charles Spaniel*. Daguerreotype, circa 1850 (MIT Museum).

<http://www.photographymuseum.com/bryshow.html>

The rather glum girl in Figure A1.50 has no doubt been handed the Staffordshire dog in an attempt to keep her occupied and still during what was probably a long exposure. I can't discern whether the dog is plaster of Paris or ceramic.

Plaster figurine seller: 1850

Figure A1.51: Plaster figurine seller. 1850, *Le Magasin Pittoresque*. Karl Girardet.

Note the three (at least) Napoleons, an infant Samuel praying and the seller's padded hat in Figure A1.51. See Appendix II p 193, for more from *Le Magasin Pittoresque*. The tray has an edging barrier.²⁴

²⁴ ²⁴ See also Figures A.1.10, A1.42, A1.48, A1. 63, A1.70, A1.74, A1.78 and A1.92.

Italian Image-Makers: 1850-60



Figure A1.52: Italian image-makers, New York, 1850. (Sensi-Olani, pers comm)

The mid-century illustration of an image-makers' workshop in New York (Figure A1.52) shows, on the left, an image-seller about to set off for the street, with his *galera* on his head. The central image-maker is putting the finishing touches to a Venus de Medici. A Farnese Hercules lurks under the bench to the right, while the Borghese Gladiator stands in the foreground. In the centre of the bench stands a figurine of *The Spear Bearer* by Polykleitos, and the image-maker on the right is working on either another Spear Bearer or a Pan. Amongst the figures on the seller's board appears to be a statuette of a wounded Amazon (?) and a bearded statesman. The horse appears to be a miniature version of a Roman original, but it is difficult to pinpoint; it may be a representation of a da Vinci original. Other figures in this fascinating scene are no doubt identifiable.

The Image Seller: 1850

Figure A1.53: William Daniels, Self-Portrait with Casts: the Image seller, 1850 (Katrin Bellinger collection).

<http://www.apollo-magazine.com/art-diary/drawn-from-the-antique/?map=active>

The Liverpool painter William Daniels obviously felt a romantic empathy with image-sellers, or at least their world of wandering in the company of classical gods and goddesses and literary celebrities, for in his first of two paintings of this subject he inserted himself as the peddler (Figure A1.53). He depicts himself as a young man cradling a bust of Homer in his left arm and carrying a board of figures on his head (note the spikes, he obviously had seen the real thing) with he and Shakespeare holding us in their gaze. Although the bulk of the

images are suitably “artistic” Daniels does include a small but gaily-painted green and red parrot near the front of the board, where there is also a small Crouching Venus.

Buy a bust of General Taylor? 1850



Figure A1.54: Itinerant seller of plaster casts. 1850. William Croome

William Croome’s illustration (Figure A1.54) for *City Cries or a Peep at Scenes in Town by an Observer* features a somewhat gloomy image-seller whose tray includes a horse, a bow pot and a number of unidentifiable figures and busts. It is likely that the large bust he is cradling was General Zachary Taylor, the twelfth President of the United States, who died the year the book was published.

Who'll buy my images? 1851

Aunt Mary's Primer (1851) was published in Providence, Rhode Island, as a reading and writing aid. It may be that the illustration of an image seller on a page entitled "London Cries" (Figure A1.55) was taken from another publication.



Figure A1.55: *Who'll buy my images?* 1851. *Aunt Mary's Primer*.

The wares of the image seller include a column, a Napoleon, a probable Shakespeare (or a knight), and a possible Crouching Venus.

Girl with chalkware cat: 1850-1865

Figure A1.56: *Girl with chalkware cat*, c1850-1865.

<https://www.skinnerinc.com/news/blog/daguerreotypes-early-photography-collection-rod-mackenzie/>

Figure A1.56 is an ambrotype, a short-lived photographic technique that enables us to date this image to just after the mid nineteenth century. The sitter is holding a plaster of Paris cat decorated with smoke smudges which has probably been handed to her to keep her still during the long exposure.

The Figure Merchant: 1852

Figure A1.57a: *The Figure Merchant*, 1852. Frontispiece for *Godey's Lady's Book*.

The hawker in *The Figure Merchant* (Figure A1.57) carries a board crowded with figures, most of which are coloured. A woman and two small children stand in a cottage doorway, and behind them is a bucolic landscape. The images seller's board has a peg at each corner both to facilitate holding it and probably resting it on the ground. He is holding out a Madonna and child, while on the board stands a prominent Napoleon. Other Napoleons are visible, one in the rear and one on the right. This particular hawker has a number of religious figures and several busts, but no animals. *Godey's Picture Book* was published in Philadelphia, and the specially commissioned engraving presumably reflects American tastes

at the time. The magazine was hugely successful.



Figure A1.57b: *The Figure Merchant*, 1852 (Detail).

The Image Man: 1852

The illustration of the image boy in *Aunt Busy Bee's New London Cries* (Figure A1.58) not only shows an accident befalling the unfortunate vendor, but includes a large figurine of Napoleon, a column, Prince Albert and the Duke of Wellington. It also demonstrates that the dowels that held the figurines on the board were not always sufficient to prevent upsets. The accompanying verse reminds us of the impecunious state of image boys, but also perhaps echoes the cynicism of the writer in *The Graphic* in 1872 (see below). Note the prominent bollard.²⁵

²⁵ See Section 10, page 413.

Figure A1.58: *The Image Man*, 1852. *Aunt Busy Bee's New London Cries*.

<http://spitalfieldslife.com/2011/06/03/aunt-busy-bees-new-london-cries/>

THE IMAGE MAN

Alas! Alas! Poor Image Boy, what a crash is here!

You've trod upon some orange peel, and slipped, I sadly fear,

Or else your board you've balanced wrong, or 'gainst a post have hit,

But whatsoever is the cause, it matters not a bit.

Now, little boy and little girl, if you have pence to spare,

*Pray give them to the image boy, his losses to repair.
There goes the Duke of Wellington, with only half a nose,
And there's Prince Albert on his head, instead of on his toes.
Poor boy! Let's hope each passer by will pity his misshap,
And drop a halfpenny or more, into his furry cap.*

Figure A1.58a: Cover of *Aunt Busy Bee's New London Cries* showing image seller in bottom left corner. Note bollard.

Figure A1.58b: Image seller on cover of *Aunt Busy Bee's New London Cries* (enlargement)

Come buy my pretty images: 1856



Figure A1.59a: Cover of sheet music for song *Come Buy My Pretty Images*.



Figure A1.59b: *Come Buy My Pretty Images*. Detail of the image-seller's tray. (left-right) Florence Nightingale, Omar Pasha? Queen Victoria, General Windham?, Charles Napier?, Prince Albert, Admiral Lyons, Field Marshall Campbell?.

For a discussion and analysis of this ballad, see Section 9, page 318.

Image Boy: 1858

Paul Crowther identifies this romantic subject, who appears to be nervously delivering or soliciting an order, as the boy who appears at the back to the left of centre in Collinson's *Italian Image* (Figure A1.60), pointing out his similar jacket and trousers, and the resemblance of his hat to that on the left of that painting. Crowther also feels that this painting is "an excellent example of Collinson's enigma studies" and mentions the contrast between the "purity of the plaster model" and the boy's well-worn clothing (Crowther 2014).

Figure A1.60: *Image Boy*, 1858? James Collinson. The boy is carrying a bust of Clytie.

<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/collinson/paintings/2.html>

The Image Boy: 1854

Abraham Le Blond created a set of 32 oval pictures that were printed directly onto their mounts using the Baxter process, and included an image boy as one of his famous “ovals” (Figure A1.61). Each image communicated a nostalgic vision of idealised and perhaps unrealistic country life earlier in the nineteenth century. Like most of the ovals, this image includes the family pet.

Figure A1.61: The Image Boy, 1854-1867. Abraham Le Blond. Victoria and Albert Museum.

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O597676/the-image-boy-baxter-process-print-le-blond-abraham/>

The Image Seller: before 1860

A painter of street scenes, “Gypsy Oakley” was almost bound to include an image seller in his oeuvre (Figure A1.62). Oakley’s subject is perhaps another idealised individual – it is unlikely that a poor Italian street-boy would be as attractive and neatly-smudged as this example. He wears a wide-brimmed hat, almost a uniform of his trade, and a short jacket. There are also similarities with Collinson’s *Image Boy* (Figure A1.59).

Figure A1.62: *The Image Seller*, nd but before 1860. Octavius Oakley.²⁶

<http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/15041/lot/104/>

²⁶ British artist, 1800-1867.

Marchand de statuettes: 1861

Figure A1.63: *Marchand de statuettes*, 1861. *La Semaine des enfants*.

Gallica.bnf.fr

An illustration from the children's book, *La Semaine des enfants: magazine d'images et de lectures amusantes et instructives*, the image-seller in Figure A1.63 joined other street sellers in a section depicting *Cris de Paris*. It is possible to make out a Napoleon and a Venus on a tray that has an edging barrier.²⁷

²⁷ See also Figures A.1.10, A1.42, A1.48, A1.51, A1.70, A1.74, A1.78 and A1.92.

The Italian Image Seller: 1862

Figure A1.64a: *The Italian Image Seller*, 1862. Hugh Cameron

<https://www.scholarsresource.com/browse/work/2144662027>

Hugh Cameron's painting depicts an exhausted adult image-seller sleeping against a wall (Figure A1.64). The supportson which his board stands are presumably intended to rest on the seller's shoulders.²⁸ The peddler's wares include an *enfant dessinant* that may be spotted on other boards (see Figure A1.37), as well as a Madonna and Child, a bust of Milton, a praying Samuel, a Venus and a Walter Scott. A review of the exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy felt that although the work showed "excellent painting, good colour, well-studied expression, and admiral handling" it nevertheless depicted a subject that would "excite only a faint interest". (The Caledonian Mercury, Edinburgh, Scotland, Thursday, February 20, 1862)

²⁸ See also Figures A1.35, A1.44, A1.69 and A1.78.

Figure A1.64b: *The Italian Image Seller, 1862. (Detail)*

Garibaldi: 1862

Figure A1.65a: *Triste Presentimento (Sad Presentiment),* Girolamo Induno (1862).

<http://pinacotecabrera.org/en/collezione-online/opere/triste-presentimento/>

In Induno's painting (Figure A1.65) a young woman fears for the wellbeing of her lover, who is fighting for Garibaldi, whose bust gazes out of a niche behind her (Boime 1993, 63).

Figure A1.65b: *Triste Presentimento* (detail).

The Italian Image Seller: 1870

William Daniels, “the Rembrandt of Liverpool”, painted two image sellers (see also Figure A1.53). Figure A1.66, created in 1870, reminds us that not all the hawkers were boys or young. A plaster-splattered man rests on a low wall gazing rather sardonically at the viewer, beside two classical casts, one a bust and the other a statuette. Behind him a wintry landscape stretches to a misty horizon. The bust is interestingly enough of Clytie, apparently identical to the bust in Collinson’s earlier painting (Figure A1.60). The nude figure of Hermes is perhaps echoed by many more approximate depictions in other illustrations. That the seller is splattered with plaster might indicate that he is also a maker of images.

Figure A1.66: *The Italian Image Seller*, 1870. William Daniels, National Museums of Liverpool.

<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=189284>

Plaster saints: 1873

Figure A1.67: *Santicos*, 1873. Spanish. (Beall 1975, 301)

“Santicos” or “saints” are still sold in the south of France. The statuettes in Figure A1.67 are crudely drawn and unidentifiable

Village Connoisseurs/Following the Fine Arts: 1870/1873

A small army of toddlers follows William McTaggart’s image boy in his ironically-titled *Village Connoisseurs* of 1870 (Figure A1.68a). He cradles a bust in his right arm and a figure, perhaps of Venus, in his left. He appears to be almost the same boy as that in Collinson’s (Figure A1.60) and Oakley’s paintings (Figure A1.62), with a similar hat, trousers and gaiters, a bust in his right arm and a female figurine in his left.

Figure A1.68a: *Village Connoisseurs*, 1870. William McTaggart.

http://goldenagepaintings.blogspot.co.uk/2010_05_01_archive.html

“Tarbert had proved so rich in suggestion of pictorial incident that McTaggart went back the following summer; and, after a year’s interval, he paid a third visit in 1871. On the earlier of these occasions he began the important subjects subsequently known as ‘Village Connoisseurs,’ or ‘Following the Fine Arts,’ and ‘Adrift.’ The idea of the former first took form in a grotesque but highly suggestive little water-colour in one of his sketch-books. This shows the composition and the grouping of the figures almost as they were carried out in the oil picture commenced at Tarbert and completed in his Edinburgh studio, in time for next ‘Exhibition. The subject was an attractive one. In the serene sunshine of a summer day, a crowd of fisher-children, wonder blended with curiosity in their delightfully expressive faces, and eagerness or absorption evident in their every movement, troop — as the youngsters of Hamelin

followed the Pied Piper — after a swarthy Italian image seller, only a few years older than themselves, along a road beside the slumbrous sea. When at the Scottish Academy in 1870 this picture, now in the possession of Mrs. Lawrie of Monkkrigg, was called 'Village Connoisseurs.' Two or three years later the artist recurred to the same motive and, with more complex accessories of nets and boats and with greater elaboration, if rather less spirit and success, painted the much larger version recently in Mr. Jordan's collection. That was shown in the London Academy of 1874 with the even happier title 'Following the Fine Arts.'

(Caw 1917, 51-52)

In the second version (Figure A1.66b), now retitled *Following the fine arts*, McTaggart simplified the middle ground, made the shadows less blobby and changed the spacing of the group a little. The image-boy's hat has also changed shape.

Figure A1.68b: *Following the fine arts*, 1874. William McTaggart.

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/william-mctaggart/following-the-fine-arts-1mQkN1RKNQ-JdmnkWo4tXg2>

A tempting offer: 1874

Figure A1.69: *A Tempting Offer*, 1874. Adolphe Weisz.

<https://www.periodpaper.com/collections/portrait/products/1874-wood-engraving-adolphe-weisz-art-a-tempting-offer-statuette-merchant-ytg7-228650-ytg7-008>

French artist Adolphe Weisz depicts his image seller (Figure A1.69) offering a figure of a small boy, perhaps a Cupid, to two young Swiss women. His board is fitted with shoulder supports like those in Figures A1.44 and A1.64.²⁹ The itinerant's hat is very much like that of the sellers in Figures A1.90, A1.62 and A1.68a.

²⁹ See also Figures A1.35, A1.44, A1.69 and A1.78.

A tempting offer

... in the engraving before us, which is from a clever picture by Mr. A. Weisz, lately exhibited in the French Gallery, Pall Mall, we are transported to a sunnier clime, and one more congenial to statuary than the dingy back streets of London. Here the scene is a picturesque chalet, and two pretty countrywomen of the renowned William Tell are bargaining with the merchant who evidently hails from the southern slopes of the Alps for a little figure, which looks suspiciously a wingless Cupid.

(*The Graphic* January 10 1874)

Statuettes ne gagne rien, 1875

Figure A1.70: *Statuettes ne gagne rien, 1875. Loterie alphabetique des cris de Paris.*

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6938538b>

“Statuettes for next to nothing” I think is the translation of the cry of the French image-seller depicted on an alphabet of street cries (Figure A1.70). Note his blue jacket and red waistcoat. The tray has a barrier.³⁰

³⁰ See also Figures A.1.10, A1.42, A1.48, A1.51, A1. 63, A1.74, A1.78 and A1.92.

The veteran: 1878

Figure A1.71: *The Veteran*, Chierici, 1878.

<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=28063>

In the painting *The Veteran* (Figure A1.71), Napoleon stands alone and erect, gleaming white, on the stove, the focus of the room. On one side, the old soldier is depicted recounting his memories of serving under Bonaparte. On the floor, children play with miniature soldiers, some of which have been knocked over. The little boy is about to fire a toy cannon. Perhaps the artist has painted a white figurine to speak of death (many figurines of Napoleon were coloured), or merely to make the small figure stand out proudly against the humdrum, cluttered background. The painting is of course rich in allegory, perhaps played out most obviously by the ranks of miniature soldiers that mix discipline, upstanding

courage and then, fallen and scatted, death. The old soldier communicates memory, storytelling, not all of it perhaps accurate, failing with age. The exploits of the soldier, and his hero, are far in the past, the children represent the future, the toy soldiers represent history and remind us that the armies were defeated. And Bonaparte is now reduced to a ghostly, miniature figure, enshrined at the centre of the room but mute and easily broken.

The painting is important because it uses the viewers' understanding of the roles of miniatures, even when these are presented "virtually", as two-dimensional painted media. The average nineteenth century gallery visitor would have been very familiar with plaster-of-Paris figures, might have been accosted by image-sellers on his or her way to the exhibition. They would have been very open to the messages that the figures communicated, either intrinsically (Napoleon the hero) or extrinsically (Napoleon the defeated anti-hero, the tragedy of war, the nostalgia and romanticism of the ex-soldier, the innocence and future potential of small children etc).

Plaster statuettes seller: before 1880

The elderly man in Figure A1.72 is holding up a figure that is possibly Nicholas I. Its position above Napoleon emphasises the victory of the Tsar over the Emperor. The veteran's medals refer to the Patriotic War 1812, the taking of Paris in 1814, the Turkish War of 1828-29, the Polish Revolt of 1831 and the capture of Warsaw in 1831. The subservient posture of the image-seller may refer to the triumph of the Tsar. The snowdrops to the left of the painting may also be a metaphor for hope and steadfastness.



Figure A1.72: Plaster statuettes seller, before 1880. Karl Karlovich Gampeln, Donetsk Gallery.

<http://petroart.ru/art/g/gampeln/img/13.jpg>

Le marchand de plâtres ambulants, colporteur de figurines napoléoniennes: 1883

Figure A1.73a: *Le marchand de plâtres ambulants, colporteur de figurines napoléoniennes* 1883. Hippolyte Bellangé.³¹

http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Wave/image/joconde/0067/m500202_atpico040010_p.jpg

In his 1883 painting, Hippolyte Bellangé, who usually painted military subjects, shows a peddler selling Napoleons to a rural family (Figure A1.73). The father gazes thoughtfully at an unpainted Napoleon, while his wife and children examine a painted mother and child. The diminutive peddler's board includes two green parrots and yet more Napoleons. Such is the continuing attraction of Napoleon that one can at present (2015) obtain an iPhone 6 case bearing this image for about £25.

³¹ French painter, 1800-1866.

Figure A1.73b: *Le marchand de plâtres ambulants, colporteur de figurines napoléoniennes 1883 (Detail).*

The Italian Image Vender: 1883



Figure A1.74: *The Italian Image Vender. (The Great Empire City 1883, 30)*

Oddly, given its source in a book on New York City, the image-seller in Figure A1.74 appears to be trying to sell a religious statue to an Irish woman in a rather rural scene. The image may have been bought in a job lot rather than have been commissioned for the volume. The figures include a cat and a Napoleon. It is not clear what is in the seller's basket, though it

might be that he is offering the image in exchange for old clothes. The same illustration was used five years later by the *West Kansas World* newspaper to illustrate a short article entitled *The Image Peddler* (see Appendix II, p 249). The tray has a barrier around its edge.³²

The French Quarter statuette and doll peddler: 1884

Figure A1.75: The French Quarter statuette and doll peddler, 1884. Alfred Boisseau.³³

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/alfred-w-boisseau/the-french-quarter-statuette-and-doll-peddler-ur0ors-V0UqzUhg8jvZxzA2>

³² See also Figures A.1.10, A1.42, A1.48, A1.51, A1. 63, A1.70, A1.78 and A1.92.

³³ Canadian artist, 1853-1901.

Image Boy: 1884

Figure A1.76: *Image Boy*, 1884.

The image boy in Figure A1.76, from a guide to fancy dress, may be more romantic than accurate.

PICCOLINO. An Italian image seller. Waistcoat of scarlet cloth fastened round the waist with a sash of brown silk. Green plush knee breeches. Drab cloth gaiters. Sugarloaf hat trimmed with wild flowers. Board of images on the shoulder, the jacket slung at the back.

(Anon 1884, p 53)

"The Child of Italy:" 1885



Figure A1.77: "The Child of Italy, 1885. *St Paul Daily Globe*, November 29th

Illustration in an article in the Minnesota newspaper, the *St Paul Daily Globe* (see Appendix II below, p 242). The image-seller appears to have a medallion hanging around his neck

The Italian Image Boy: 1888

The Italian Image Boy in the Canadian/American children's magazine *Belford's Annual* (Figure A1.78) has a prominent cat, Napoleon and an urn on his board, which has a guard around its edge.³⁴ It also features shoulder supports, which presumably helped to spread its

³⁴ See also Figures A.1.10, A1.42, A1.48, A1.51, A1. 63, A1.70, A1.74 and A1.92.

weight, which in this case appears to avoid it resting on the seller's head.³⁵ This particular hawkker is displaying a remarkable sense of balance – quite how he will manage to juggle the figures he has in his hands should someone wish to purchase one of those on his board remains unclear!

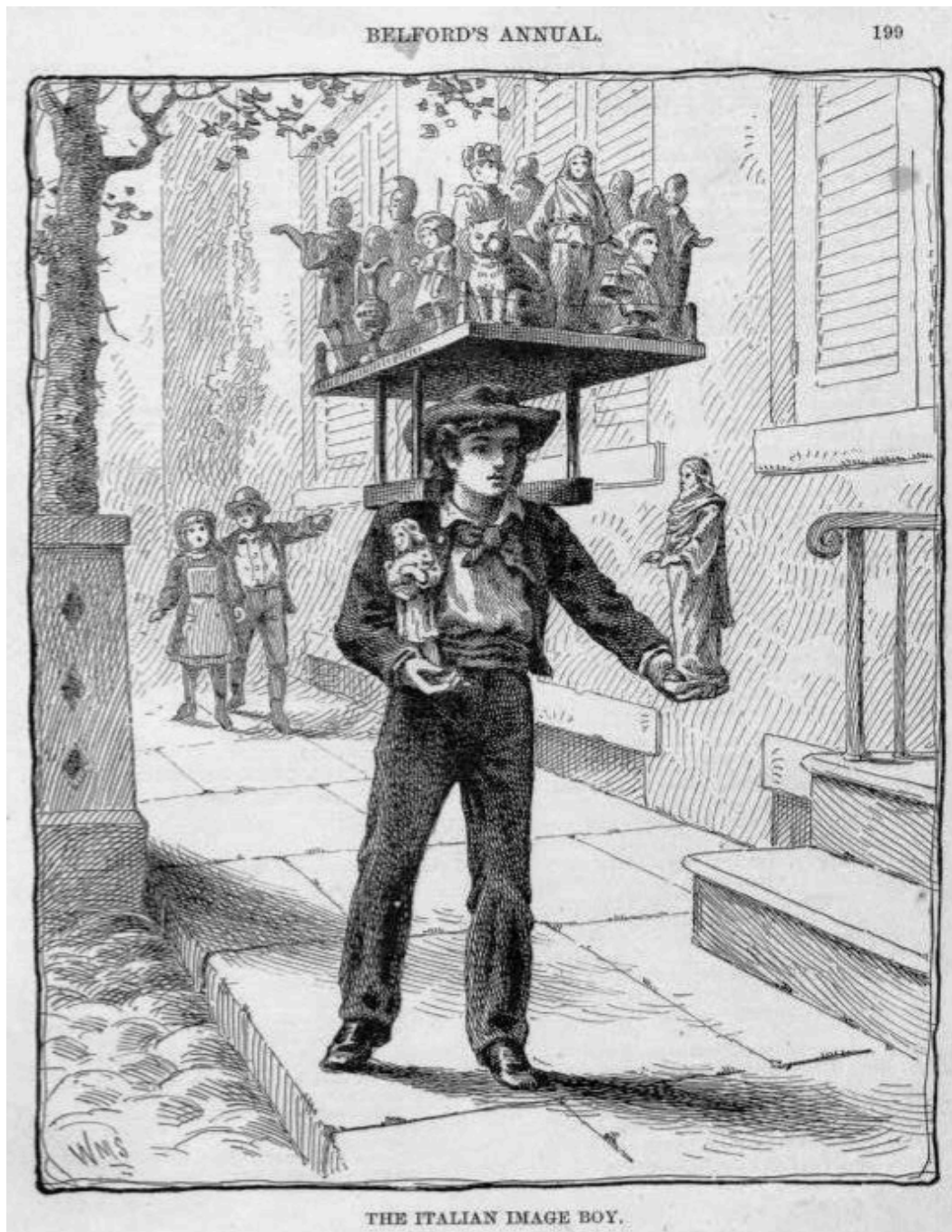


Figure A1.78: *The Italian Image Boy*, 1888. True W. Williams, Belfords Annual.

³⁵ See also Figures A1.35, A1.44, A1.64 and A1.69.

Il figurinaio (1888)

Figure A1.79a: *Il figurinaio*, 1888. Gerolamo Induno (Luigi Colombo Collection, Milan).

<http://www.arte.it/foto/da-boldini-a-segantini-i-grandi-maestri-dell-ottocento-italiano-in-mostra-a-milano-263/6>

This painting (Figure A1.79) provides some insight into the gaudy colouring of some of the figures. The *figurinaio* is painting a Madonna. Note the Napoleon standing high above him on a shelf (see detail in Figure A1.79b below).

Figure A1.79b: (detail) Napoleon stares down imperiously at the *figurinaio* in Induno's sentimental 1888 painting.

Jeunes sculpteurs sur un pont à Paris: 1888

Two tired, dark-skinned, handsome image-sellers, one a young man, one a child, lean against the parapet of a Paris bridge (Figure A1.80). They wear the (grubby) white coats that were a sort of uniform of their trade in France at the time. Behind them, von Stetten has ranged two plaster of Paris classical figures: Adonis and Apollo with Jean-Antoine Houdon's *La Frileuse* (Winter) on the extreme right. The painting is chilly (emphasised by the presence of the miniature "shivering girl"³⁶), romantic and melancholy, the child staring at us, exhausted, while the young man gazes meditatively into the evening. Behind them, the old Trocadéro Palace, built in 1878, is visible through the evening mist. It is worth comparing the sentiments of this painting with the lyrics of the song *Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes* of 1909 (see Section 9, page 320).

³⁶ Houdon's statue was nicknamed "the shivering girl" when first exhibited in 1787.

Figure A1.80: *Jeunes sculpteurs sur un pont à Paris, l'ancien Trocadéro à la distance*, 1888. Carl von Stetten.³⁷

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/carl-ernst-von-stetten/young-sculptors-on-a-bridge-in-paris-the-old-9fEC2wIfsXSSuvGVyj8f8Q2>

³⁷ German artist, 1857-1942.

Antonio Gabrielli: 1889

Figure A1.81: *Gipsfigurenverkäufer Antonio Gabrielli aus Lucca in der Potsdamer Straße in Berlin* (Plaster figures seller Antonio Gabrielli from Lucca in the Potsdamer Strasse in Berlin), 1889, Christian Wilhelm Allers.³⁸

<http://www.akg-images.de/archive/Kennst-du-das-Land...--2UMDHUF4Z9HW.html>

³⁸ German artist, 1857-1915.

The drawing by German artist W.C. Allers (Figure A1.81) is unusual (unique?) in that it names the subject, one Antonio Gabrielli. The bust Gabrielli is holding appears to be of the Emperor Wilhelm II. Sadly we are not permitted a glance into his basket.

The image-seller: 1895



On Her Head a Tray of Images.

Figure A1.82: *On Her Head a Tray of Images*, 1895. *The Princeton Union*

Illustration to a short story, *The Iconoclast*, by Elizabeth Pullen, in *The Princeton Union*, a Minnesota newspaper (see *Appendix II below*, p 264). The few occurrences of female image-sellers were, it seems, limited to fiction.

The Image Seller: 1898

German artist Guido Bach painted a female seller of religious images in Italy in 1898 (Figure A1.83).

Figure A1.83: *The Image Seller*, 1898. Guido Bach.³⁹

<http://artsalesindex.artinfo.com/auctions/Guido-Bach-4812137/The-image-seller-1898>

³⁹ German artist, p1828-1905

Fine art: 1904

Figure A1.84 illustrated a report in *The San Francisco Call* newspaper in which one Signor Palechi was in court for non-payment of a hawker's licence (see *Appendix II below, p 280*).



Figure A1.84: *Ah! Da fina da arta!* 1904 *The San Francisco Call*.

Undated Nineteenth Century illustrations

Image seller: nd

Figure A1.85: *Image Seller*. Undated (1816-1860) watercolour by nineteenth-century Scottish artist.

<http://lapada.org>

The image seller in Figure A1.85, one of a number of similar illustrations painted by an anonymous Scottish artist before 1860, is notable for his striped trousers. Otherwise, he has a suitably swarthy countenance, and on his board, as well as several busts, stands Napoleon, a parrot and Venus de Medici. His striped trousers are similar to an 1830 German illustration (Figure A1.26).

Schöne figuren: nd

Figure A1.86: *Schöne figuren* (Beautiful figures).

The difficult-to-translate verse in Figure A1.86 makes fun of the hollowness of the casts, that are as silent as the grave. The statuettes include Homer, a possible Shakespeare and a Hercules.

Schöne Figuren für molfeiles Geld

Es gibt zwar genug hole kopf

Doch diese kopf, die ich von Gips vahier hab,

Die reden nichts dumes sein still wie das Grab,

Auch braucht man gar nie mal sie zu ver kosten

Solch leere köpfe die sind doch am besten.

Plaster workshop: nd

Figure A1.87: A Plaster Workshop

<http://www.ebay.de/itm/In-der-Werkstatt-der-Gipsgiesser-Volpe-Handwerk-orig-Holzstich-SUPERPREIS-V-0423-/371153575462>

Image-seller: nd



Figure A1.88: Undated woodcut probably by Bewick

The woodcut in Figure A1.88, one of Hindley's 1881 collection, appears to include the Borghese Gladiator, a bow pot and a bird.

Postuer koop: nd

Figure A1.89: *Postuer koop*, second half of nineteenth century (Beall 1975)

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search/objects?q=verkoper+van+beelden&p=8&ps=12&st=OBJECTS&ii=9#/RP-P-OB-203.120,93>

Plaster Image Seller: before 1880

Figure A1.90: *Plaster Image Seller* Alexandre-Marie Guillemin (1817-1880).

<https://iamachild.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/the-plaster-figure-seller.jpg>

Pendant le jour je cours les rues: nd

Figure A1.91: *Pendant le jour je cours les rues, Criant: achetez, bustes, statues*, second half of nineteenth century.
Anonymous, note bollard.⁴⁰ (Beall 1975, 455)

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search/objects?q=verkoper+van+beelden&p=10&ps=12&st=OBJECTS&ii=2#/RP-P-OB-203.039,110>

“As I wander the streets I’m always crying ‘Buy Images!’”

“All day long I wander the streets crying buy, busts, statues!”

⁴⁰ See Section 10, page 413.

Koopt mensen: nd

Figure A1.92: Koopt mensen, koopt postuer?? (Beall 1975)

It is not possible to identify the figures in this tiny image. The seller's tray has a barrier at its edge.⁴¹

Marchand de figures de gypse: nd

Figure A1.93: *Marchand de figures de gypse* (nd) (Beall 1975)

⁴¹ See also Figures A.1.10, A1.42, A1.48, A1.51, A1. 63, A1.70, A1.74 and A1.78.

Gipsfiguren koof: nd

Figure A1.94: *Gipsfiguren koof*

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search/objects?q=verkoper+van+beelden&p=3&ps=12&st=OBJECTS&ii=4#/RP-P-OB-204.572,28>

The image-seller in Figure A1.94 is carrying a huge cast of Eros embracing Psyche.

Twentieth Century Images

In the early twentieth century it was in France that images of image-sellers continued to be captured, mostly now by the camera, and published as post cards. Most of these were undated. Although some bear dated postmarks, the image on the card could be much earlier.

Marchand de statuettes: 1900

Figure A1.95: Marchand de statuettes. 1900 Louis Borgex.

<http://www.akg-images.com/archive/Marchand-de-statuettes-2UMDHUNB9WR7.html>

Figure A1.95, by Louis Borgex (1873-1959) is likely a chocolate promotional card. The child is depicted selling plaster figures in the Rue Soufflot, Paris. It is possible to make out a Venus de Milo, a Napoleon and a Washington.

Le marchand de statuettes: 1901

LES PETITS MÉTIERS DE PARIS.
Le marchand de statuettes.

Figure A1.96: *Le Marchand de statuettes*, 1901. Simond, Charles 1901. *Paris de 1800 à 1900, tome III, 1870-1900*. Paris: Plon.

This image also appeared forty years earlier, in 1861, in a children's book (Figure A1.63).

Italy in London: 1902-3



Figure A1.97: Italians in London, 1902-3.

An illustration of an Italian image-seller (Figure A1.97) accompanied an article by Count E. Armfelt in George Sims's *Living London*.

Anguish and sorrows ignored: 1903

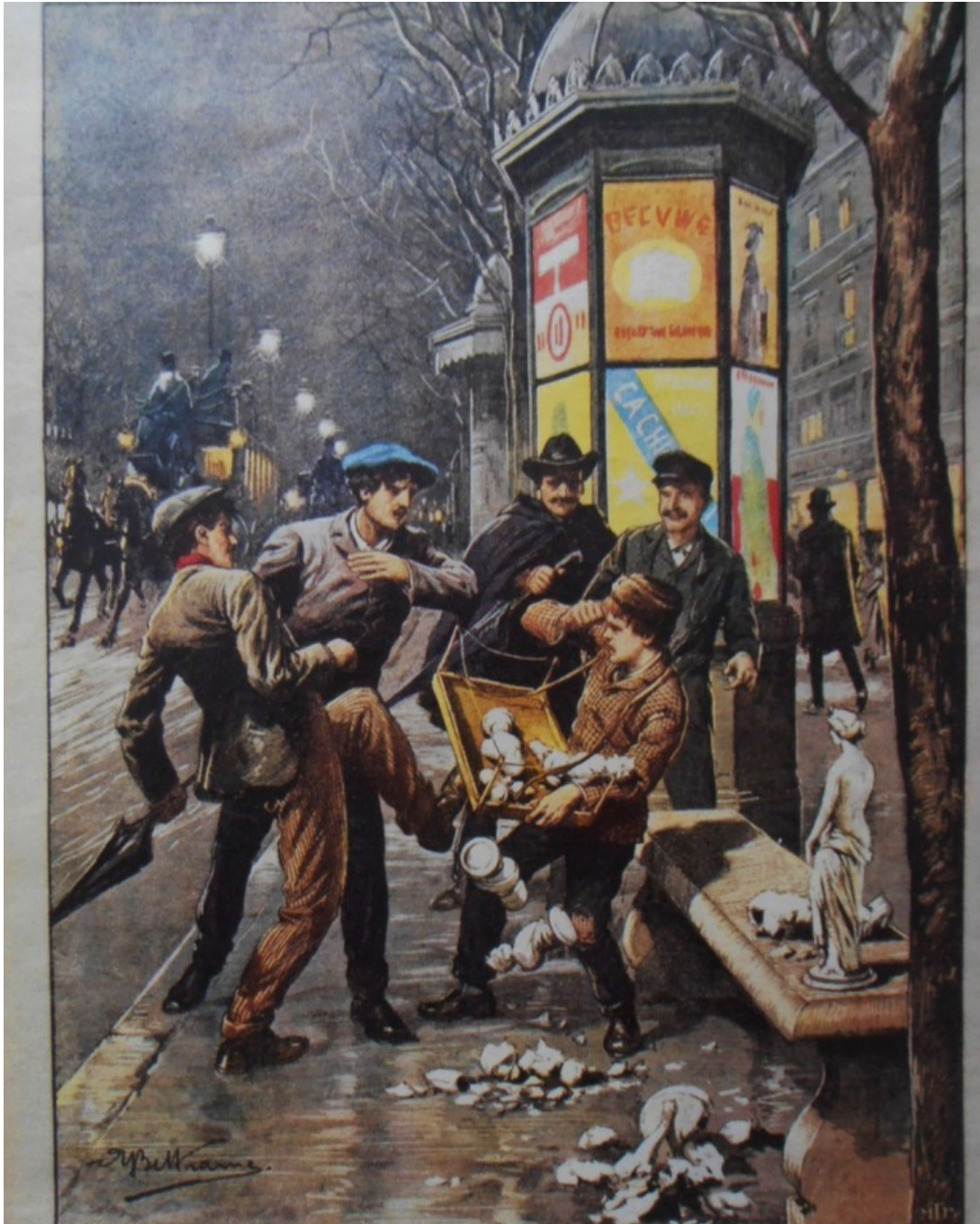


Figure A1.98: *Angoscie e dolori ignorati: il dramma del piccolo figurinaio Italiano Aristide Borelli, a Parigi* (Anguish and sorrows ignored: the drama of the small Italian *figurinaio* Aristide Borelli, in Paris) 1903. *La Domenica del Corriere*.

This illustration, which appeared on 5th April 1903, 1903, illustrated a story that was familiar at the time (see Section 7, p204).

Les statuettes: 1903

Figure A1.99: *Les Statuettes*, 1903. French postcard.

http://cpapost.fr/fr/cartes-postales-themes-illustrateurs-photographes/10155-les-statuettes-bergeret.html?search_query=Les+Statuettes&results=1

The postcard features two versions of the Venus de Milo, a moulded bracket and a bust that is similar to that in Figure A.1.132 in the foreground.

<i>Allons, Messieurs, faites emplette</i>	<i>Come, gentlemen, shop</i>
<i>D'une petite statuette!</i>	<i>For a small statuette!</i>
<i>Voyez, le choix en est charmant,</i>	<i>See, the choice is charming,</i>
<i>Elles vous feront constamment</i>	<i>They will make you constantly</i>
<i>Risette!</i>	<i>smile like a baby!</i>

A.G.

Street Urchin: 1904

Figure A1.100: *Parisian Street Urchin*, 1905. Basile Lemeunier.⁴²

<https://www.magnoliabox.com/products/a-parisian-street-urchin-aalq001015>

⁴² French painter, 1852-1922.

The artist's model: after 1900

Figure A1.101a: *Marchand de statuettes* (nd)

<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/marchand-de-statuettes-582789>

Figure A1.101b: *Le petite marchand de statuettes*, 1904? Marie-Martin Demezil.

<http://webmuseo.com/ws/mbat/app/collection/image/148?ilmg=0>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, painter Marie Martin-Demezil⁴³ used a (Figure A1.101a) postcard as a model for her painting *Le petit marchand de statuettes*. The postcard, printed in Tours, was in circulation in 1906, when a “lined sower” 10c stamp was attached to a surviving example. Martin-Demezil has added a background and made the child look even younger. The figurine he is holding is of Jeanne d’Arc.

⁴³ Marie Martin-Demezil (1872-1944)

Abus de Confiance: 1906

Figure A1.102: *Abus de Confiance* (Breach of trust), 1906. French postcard.

<http://www.ebay.fr/itm/Cpa-Abus-de-confiance-chaussures-Rousset-/272525678905>

The figurine on the right, the *Florentine Lute player* (Dubois?) appears to have been strengthened around the feet. The significance of the title is not clear. The boy is imitating the pose of the figurine behind him.

Marchand de statuettes: 1907

Figure A1.103: *Marchand de Statuettes*, c1907. Tavik Frantisek Simon.⁴⁴

<http://www.tfsimon.com/74.bmp.jpg>

It is possible to make out a bust of Salome/Judith/Cleopatra in this distant view of an image-seller, wearing a long overcoat, beside the Seine in Paris.

⁴⁴ Polish artist, 1877-1942. Worked in France 1904-1914.

Le marchand de statuettes: 1908

Figure A1.104: *Le marchand de statuettes* 1908, Olivier Duchateau.⁴⁵

<http://www.docsgallery.be/oeuvre-list-details,Le-marchand-de-statuettes,122,0.html>

⁴⁵ French painter, 1876-1939.

Marchand de statuettes: 1908

Figure A1.105a: *Marchand de statuettes, Paris 1908*. Jacques Boyer.

<http://www.parisenimages.fr/fr/galerie-collections/5524-10-vendeur-statuettes-paris-1908>

Sadly the resolution of this postcard photograph is not high enough to identify all the figures, but a Venus de Milo is visible on the extreme left (Figure A1.105b), and at least two busts of Napoleon. To the right are three Beethovens, another Venus and another Napoleon, with possibly a Jean D-Arc on the extreme right (Figure A1.105c).

Figure A1.105b: Detail of *Manchand de Statuettes, 1908*.

Figure A1.105c: Detail of *Manchand de Statuettes*, 1908.

Statuettes, cheap! 1909



Figure A1.106: *Pas cher, monsieur, les statues!* 1909.

This illustration from a *Les Gagne-Petit de Rues de Paris* (The working-poor of the streets of Paris) shows an image-seller peddling figurines of the *Florentine lute player* and *Boy with goose*.

The Porcelain Figurine Seller: before 1916

Figure A1.107: *The Porcelain Figurine Seller*, Vittorio Rignano⁴⁶, before 1916

http://www.arcadja.com/auctions/en/rignano_vittorio/artist/38432/

Inaccurately titled, the boy in Figure A1.107 is selling the cast that we see being finished in Figure A1.108 below. His stock also includes *The Bather* (Allegrain, 1767) and the *Three Graces*.

⁴⁶ Italian painter, 1860-1916.

In the sculptor's studio: before 1916

Figure A1.108: *In the Sculptor's Studio*, before 1916. Vittorio Rignano.

<https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/16606/lot/96/?category=list>

In this painting we are shown the interior of a maker of plaster figurines, who were often referred to as “sculptors”. In this probably romanticised view, the *padrone* is making the finishing touches to the figure that is being offered for sale in Figure A1.107 above, using liquid plaster of Paris. Another is being constructed from several casts in the background by a boy whose appearance and hat closely match that of the boy in Figure A1.107. The *Three Graces* are visible behind the sculptor, with a *Mercury* prominent on the left and a *Venus de Medici* on the right.

French image-seller: c 1918**Figure A1.109: Postcard, France**

https://www.delcampe.fr/fr/collections/search?term=&categories%5B0%5D=3698&order=price_desc t

The message on the reverse of this card reads “Souvenir du Marchand de Statuettes Odette Prulos (?) 5 Septembre 1918.” The image-seller’s stock appears very limited. This image seems to be illustrating a narrative rather than recording an occupation. The presence of a military cap is puzzling. Perhaps the peddler is a war veteran. A small version of the bust in Figures A1.99 and A1.135 is visible.

Le Marchand de Statuettes: 1924.

Figure A1.110: *Le Marchand de Statuettes*, 1924. Geo Roelandt.

<http://bav.hu/aukcio-tetel/roelandt-geo-a-szoborarus-1924>

A late, perhaps romanticised portrait of an image seller, who offers a bronzed statuette of the Venus de Milo. A copy of a bust by Guglielmo Pugi can be seen in his basket.

Les Statuettes du petit Sicilien: 1931



Figure A1.111: *Les Statuettes du petit Sicilien*, 1931. *Lisette*.

An image seller could still be a character in a popular magazine story (Figure A1.111) in 1931. His description as a “Sicilian” is likely to be a racial generalisation. There are no records of image sellers coming from the south of Italy (*Lisette*, May 10th 1931).

Le marchand de statuettes: 1938

Figure A1.112: *Le marchand de statuettes surveille sa fragile marchandise*, 1939. *La Populaire*, France.

French image-seller: 1944-5

Figure A1.113: *Le Marchand de Statuettes*. Postcard, France

<http://tinyurl.com/zu2cl4x>

A 1944 stamp on this postcard suggests that some image sellers were still active in France after WW2. However, given the woman's clothing, this may be a pre-war image that was still in circulation. *Le Marchand de Statuettes* in Figure A1.113 appears to have stuffed his basket with paper to prevent damage. He is offering his customer a miniature representation of *Psyche Revived by Love's Kiss*, by Canova (1787). There might be some irony intended by that exchange!

Undated, twentieth century

Figure A1.114a: *Le petit marchand de statuettes* (1899-1900)
Eugène Atget.

Figure A1.114b: *Le petit marchand de statuettes*, rear
view.

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/63515/eugene-atget-le-petit-italien-marchand-de-statuettes-italian-statue-vendor-french-1899-1900/>

The French photographer Eugène Atget (1857-1927) helpfully recorded both front and back views of an image-seller around the turn of the centuries. The extreme contrast of the image means that identifying the figurines is almost impossible. He is holding a flute player in his left hand and what looks suspiciously like a Napoleon in his right.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.115: Untitled postcard, France, early twentieth century (Archivio Paolo Cresci)

The image-seller is holding a bust of Salome/Judith/Cleopatra.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.116: Untitled postcard, France, early twentieth century

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.117: *Le Marchand de Plâtres*. Postcard; France Early twentieth century

The busts appear in several very similar versions in a number of postcards. They can be identified as *Judith*, *Salome* or *Cleopatra*. Some had the name inscribed on their base. The bust in the seller's right arm could be a copy of Marcel Debut's *Les pavots* (the poppies).

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.118: Untitled postcard, France, early twentieth century

The image-sellers wares include a prominent *Boy with goose* (see *Figure A1.106* above).

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.119: Untitled postcards, France, early twentieth century

<http://lakevio.canalblog.com/archives/2012/02/27/23595579.html>

Note the bust of Salome/Judith/Cleopatra.

Le marchand de statuettes: nd.

Figure A1.120: Le marchand de statuettes (nd) Edmond Lajoux.

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/edmond-lajoux/le-marchand-de-statuettes-iSyQy9DvVRk1v4fjX059Gw2>

Edmond Lajoux was better known as an artist of military subjects.

They brought art to the average home: nd

Figure A1.121: *Bringing Art into America's Homes*. (Scarpaci 2008)

An undated illustration from Scarpaci's book *The Journey of Italians in America* (Scarpaci 2008).

A pretty, cheap statue: nd.

Figure A1.122: *Un' bell' statue pas chere!* Les Cris de Paris. nd.

https://images-03.delcampe-static.net/img_large/auction/000/199/951/296_001.jpg

The three bars of “music” appear to indicate that the cry “Un’ bell’ sta-tue pas chere!” (A pretty statuette, not expensive) rose in inflection with the first two (truncated) words to a slightly higher note on the first half of statue, then levelled out. The peddler is holding a Venus de Milo.

Cupid and his mother Venus: nd.

Figure A1.123: *Buy the little god Cupid and his mother Venus*. Charles Maurin? (1856-1914) French cigarette card.

https://images-01.delcampe-static.net/img_large/auction/000/033/577/516_001.jpg

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.124: *Marchand de Statuettes* (nd). French chocolate card.

https://images-04.delcampe-static.net/img_large/auction/000/153/303/601_001.jpg

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.125: Le marchand de statuettes. (nd) French postcard.

https://images-01.delcampe-static.net/img_large/auction/000/298/009/803_001.jpg

Another bust of Salome/Judith/Cleopatra is present in Figure A1.125, as well as a large column.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.126: Marchand de Statuettes. French postcard, Postmarked 1903

https://www.delcampe.net/en_GB/collectables/postcards/france-limoges/limoges-les-petits-metiers-de-la-rue-marchand-de-statuettes-cachet-postal-ambulant-de-toulouse-a-paris-1909-154242576.html

At least one version of this card carried a poem, see p 275.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.127: Le Marchand de Statuettes, nd. French postcard

https://www.delcampe.net/en_GB/collectables/postcards/professions-other/metiers-69ph54-types-de-la-rue-2-cpa-precursur-le-marchand-de-statuette-le-marchand-d-allumettes-de-contrebande-294455258.html

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A128: Un Marchand de Statuettes (nd)

Note the bust of Salome/Judith/Cleopatra, presumably based on an original by Jean Alfred Fortay.

Italian image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.129: Image-seller in front of St Agnes church, Piazza Navona, Rome (c.1890).

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.130: *Petit Italien Marchand de Statuettes*, nd. French postcard.

<http://www.ebay.fr/itm/CARTE-POSTALE-PARIS-PETIT-ITALIEN-MARCHAND-DE-STATUETTES-/190812427532>

Little Italian statuette-seller: nd.

Figure A1.131: *Petit Italiene Marchand de Statuettes de Platre*, nd. French postcard.

<http://www.priceminister.com/offer/buy/272491228/cp-reedition-types-de-la-rue-petit-italien-marchand-de-statuette-et-platre.html?filter=20>

Pictured in Toulouse, Figure A1.131 is one of a series of “Types de la Rue.” The boy is holding two urns and a large medallion/bas-relief.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.132: *Marchand de statuettes*, nd. French postcard.

<http://parismuseescollections.paris.fr/fr/musee-carnavalet/oeuvres/le-petit-marchand-de-statuettes-italiennes-boulevard-saint-martin-devant-le>

Figure A1.132 can probably be dated by the Renaissance Theatre poster in the background, which locates the moment at 20 Boulevard Saint-Martin, Paris. *Iphigénie en Tauride* is an opera by Gluck that was mounted at the Opéra-Comique in 1900. The opera *Martin et Martine* was premiered in 1898 in the Théâtre Municipal in Nice. Sadly the contact is so high that the detail of the casts has been lost. The figure in the image seller's right hand appears to be of a greyhound. He has a small figurine in his left hand and a large cast on his back.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.133: *Marchand de statuettes*, nd. French postcard, Bordeaux.

https://images-02.delcampe-static.net/img_large/auction/000/331/802/340_001.jpg

Note the bust of Salome/Judith/Cleopatra. It appears to be gilded.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.134: Marchand de statuettes, nd. French postcard.

http://cartespostales.eu/tours/109134-TOURS__s_rie_des_m_tiers_de_Tours_n__423____marchand_de_statuettes_-_tr_s_bon__tat.html

The figure on the right is a copy of *Tunisian Water Carrier* by Marcel Debut.

French image-seller: nd.

Figure A1.135: Image-seller in France, nd.

Yet another Salome/Judith/Cleopatra.

Marchand de dorure: nd.

Figure A1.136: *Marchand de dorure*, nd. French postcard.

https://www.delcampe.fr/fr/collections/search?term=&categories%5B0%5D=5656&country=NET&order=price_desc

Figure A1.136 shows a seller of gilded figures standing beside his stall on a cobbled French street. The bust to his right is very familiar.

Images without images

Some paintings and engraving exist only as catalogue entries and reviews, although they may be in private collections or in galleries and museums that have yet to share their collections in digital formats. An example is *Italian Image Seller* by James Holmes, reviewed by the periodical *The Spirit and Manners of the Age* in 1828:

Mr HOLMES has four pictures; all of which possess considerable merit, and are executed with that force, delicacy, and effect, for which this artist is so greatly distinguished. His most conspicuous and best picture, is that of an Italian Image Seller, whose tray of images has been thrown down by a little urchin, who is seen in the background, endeavouring to make his escape. The poor fellow is exclaiming, "Oime⁴⁷, Santa Maria!" while at his feet lies his stock in trade of Wellingtons, Paul Prys, Buonapartes, Apollos, and candlesticks. The expression of utter despair in his countenance is admirably portrayed. In other parts of the picture there is much spirit and humour. In colouring it is rich and judicious.

(Anon 1828, 190)

That the upset tray included *Paul Pry* shows that the artist was up to date, as the character had only been debuted by John Liston in 1825 (see *Section 9, p304*). This is the only mention I've come across so far of candlesticks. James Holmes was a miniaturist, and an accompanying "sketch" of *The Infant Samuel* was "one of the sweetest and most delicately painted morsels we have ever seen" (ibid), although a review of an engraving taken from this

⁴⁷ Alas!

work thought that “it appears rather too young to suit the prophetic character in which he makes his appearance in the sacred writings” (Anon 1830, 1134).

I have yet to discover illustrations of Thomas Hovenden’s 1876 painting *Image-Seller* (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Thomas S Noble’s undated *The Image Vender*.

APPENDIX II

IMAGES IN WORDS

Introduction

This appendix is intended as a “reader,” an anthology or collection of text fragments together with a few complete pieces of writing, sourced mostly from the popular media of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It includes fuller versions of texts referred to in the body of my thesis, but others stand alone. Many are quirky and enjoyable, some amusing, some disturbing, a few mundane. All cast a little more light on the thinking of my target population(s), what they did and how they thought. Here you will find newspaper copy “fillers”, poems, brief snatches of longer fictions, news stories, commentary, opinion and bombast. Some writers are sympathetic, others scornful, some bigoted, others comic, many romantic. There are jokes, some of which I don’t understand. There are frequent references to people and events that have been forgotten.

We are told a little more about how “images” were made and sold, how they were regarded, where they went. We learn how journalists, magazine writers, poets and ordinary people regarded “images” and “image-sellers.” Writers identify and comment on the figures that were sold throughout the century.

A significant number of fragments were extracted from newspapers accessed through the *Chronicling America* database maintained by the US Library of Congress.⁴⁸ I also accessed

⁴⁸ Chronicling America: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

the *Trove* archive of Australian newspapers and the British Library newspaper archive. These consist of word-searchable scans of surviving examples of each country's news media.

Because the archives are necessarily incomplete, the texts necessarily form a fairly random sample of material that was published across the US in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other extracts are from contemporary novels and travel writings.

Many of the smaller newspapers used material from other titles, usually larger publications.

In this survey, I have not traced the articles back to those originals, both because of time constraints and because the original may no longer exist, or may not yet be digitised.

The extracts are transcribed here in single-spaced Times Roman text to save space. Original grammar and punctuation, as well as North American spelling are retained as far as possible.

Em dashes (—) were more frequently utilised in the nineteenth century than today, sometimes adjacent to commas or full stops. The shorter pieces were often inserted as “fillers” and many lacked headings. The newspapers of the time rarely had page numbers, and if present they are omitted in this reader for reasons of time. The date in the heading is the date of publication—the texts sometimes refer to events in the distant past. Plaster of Paris appears in several forms, including plaster Paris [sic], and plaster-of-paris. Shakespeare is sometimes spelled Shakspeare. A few words have presented so far unsolved challenges (for example, although I know what “tinpot” means, what is “classic Tinpot”?). Translations from Italian and French are my own clumsy efforts and are included for information rather than linguistic excellence. A list of key words follows each fragment.

Fuser Simulacrorum: 1770

... that besides carrying on the Stone Cutting Business as usual, he carries on the Art and Manufacture of a Fuser Simulacrorum, or the making of all sorts of Images, viz., Kings and Queens; 2nd. King George & Queen Charlotte; 3rd. King & Queen of Prussia; 4th. King & Queen of Denmark; 5th. King & Queen of Sweden.⁴⁹ Likewise a Number of Busts, among which are, Mathew Prior, Homer, Milton, &c. — also a number of animals such as Parrots, Dogs, Lions, Sheep, with a number of others too many to enumerate: — Said Geyer also cleans old deficient Animals, and makes them look as well as new, at reasonable Rate. All the above-mentioned Images, Animals, &c. are made of Plaister of Paris of this Country Produce, and Manufactured at a reasonable Rate

(Henry Geyer, Allis 1941)⁵⁰

Cat and parrot: 1804

ITALIA's sun-burnt native here
Does to your view display
His curious imitative ware,
With gold and colours gay.

The cat and parrot here he shows,
The poet and the priest,
With soldiers, sailors, belles and beaux,
And many a nameless beast.

Edward and Tommy gazing stand,
And each the show admires;
While puss is borne on Kitty's hand,
And Jane her bird admires.

(Harris 1804, 28)

[Key words: Italian; colours; cat; parrot; poet; priest; soldiers;
sailors]

Prelude: 1805

The Italian, as he thrids his way with care,
Steadying, far-seen, a frame of images
Upon his head; with basket at his breast

(Wordsworth, 1805)

[Key words: Italian; images; basket]

A stone from Nova Scotia: 1808

This man, although his business is not so useful or necessary as some others, yet strives to please by presenting a variety of images, or representations of animals, which he carried around to sell. This is his way

⁴⁹ "King George" = George III (1738-1820); "King of Prussia" = Frederick William II (1744-1797); "King of Denmark" = Christian VII (1749-1808); "King of Sweden" = Adolf Frederik (1710-1771), famous for eating himself to death. Matthew Prior (1664-1721) was an English poet whose achieved notable success in the early eighteenth century.

⁵⁰ Henry Christian Geyer (1727-1786) of Boston is remembered for his skills in carving gravestones, although as well as producing plaster of Paris figures, he was a fisherman, his shop being close to Boston's South Fish Market (Mould and Loewe, 223)

to get a living. They are made of plaster of Paris, which is a kind of stone that abounds at Nova-Scotia.⁵¹

(Wood? 1808, 37).

[Key words: images; animals; plaster of Paris]

Buy my images: before 1810

BUY MY IMAGES, IMAGES

Come buy my image earthenware,
Your mantel pieces to bedeck,
Examine them with greatest care,
You will not find a single speck.

(Hindley 1881, 287)

[Key words: cry; images; mantelpiece]

Pity a stranger: 1826

O, YE who can feel for the offspring of grief,
Give ear to an alien, that sues for relief,
From the cravings of hunger and outcast defend,
Bereft of a parent, relation or friend:
Pity, pity a stranger, debarred of all joy,
A destitute, wandering Italian Boy.

Seduced from a land to the sciences dear,
A poor distressed foreigner crawls about here;
His hope and dependence for lodging and bread,
The image, "fine image," he bears on his head:
Pity, pity a stranger, debarred of all joy,
A destitute, wandering Italian Boy.

"What matters," he cries, "all the grandeur I see?
The world is a desert and winter to me;
To scorn and reproach, I am doomed to appear,
No shield, no protector to succour me here.
Pity, pity a stranger, debarred of all joy,
A destitute, wandering Italian Boy."

Ye Britons, with freedom for ages renowned,
With beauty and unrivalled, and valour-deeds crowned,
Give ear to a foreigner's sorrowful strain,
And snatch him from misery, insult, and pain.
Pity, pity a stranger, debarred of all joy,
A destitute, wandering Italian Boy.

(Upton 1826, 3)

[Key words: Italian; boy; image; destitution; cry]

Venus in a petticoat: 1827

Monday, Andrea Giannone, an Italian, was charged by the street keeper of Walbrook ward with having offended against the public morals.—The street

⁵¹ Nova Scotia is still a significant producer of gypsum, the raw material of plaster-of-Paris.

keeper said the prisoner had been about the ward offering “that there image for sale,” (exhibiting to his Lordship the plaster cast of a sleeping Venus), which he (the street-keeper) considered “indecent, not to say indelicate;” and he thought in his duty to take him in custody.⁵²

Chief Clerk—I suppose persons of the street-keeper’s delicacy will shortly seize our Apollo Belvedere (alluding to a full-sized cast of that statue, recently placed in the most conspicuous part of the Egyptian hall by the Corporation Committee of Taste), and break it to pieces, to prove the superior purity of their ideas.⁵³

The Lord Mayor (to the prisoner).—What have you got to say for yourself?

The Italian, who appeared not to understand English, looked at the street-keeper, and laughed, as if in derision at him.

The Lord Mayor.—Oh, Sir, it is no laughing matter, I do assure you. I do not mind letting you go this time, but if you were caught here again, you will be punished for it.

Mr Hobler (to the officers).—Make him understand that he must not come again into the City, unless he puts petticoats on his figures. All the taste is on the other side of Temple Bar, where he must keep.

The Italian went away laughing.

(*The Examiner*, November 4th 1827)

[Key words: Italian; image; plaster cast; Venus; Apollo Belvedere; London; Temple Bar; City; Lord Mayor; court; censorship; indecency]

Cover her tail: 1827

THE LORD MAYOR AND THE ITALIAN IMAGE VENDOR

(*From the Morning Chronicle*)

Says the Lord Mayor, “Giannone,
You’re a sad Macaroni,
A subject of Boney,
Described as the Beast by St John:

From indecency screen us—
Go, shut up that Venus;
She hasn’t a rag to put on!⁵⁴

Pray, buy her a veil,
To cover her tail –
The heathenish wench may be pretty;

But unless she thinks best
To have herself drest,

Hang me if she comes in the City.

(*The Examiner*, November 4th 1827)

[Key words: Italian; Bonaparte; Venus; censorship; humour; indecency]

Considerable merit: 1828

Mr HOLMES has four pictures; all of which possess considerable merit, and are executed with that force, delicacy, and effect, for which this artist

⁵² “Sleeping Venus” was presumably a rendering of the painting by Giorgione.

⁵³ The Egyptian Hall was built in Piccadilly in 1812 and had exhibited Napoleonic relics as well as large-scale works of art. It was demolished in 1905.

⁵⁴ The Lord Mayor of London was Matthias Prime Lucas; “Boney” was Napoleon Bonaparte, who rulked the north of Italy at the time. The beast with seven heads in the Book of Revelation may originally have referred to the emperor Nero, but here it is applied to Bonaparte.

is so greatly distinguished.⁵⁵ His most conspicuous and best picture, is that of an *Italian Image Seller*, whose tray of images has been thrown down by a little urchin, who is seen in the background, endeavouring to make his escape. The poor fellow is exclaiming, “*Oime, Santa Maria!*” while at his feet lies his stock in trade of Wellingtons, Paul Prys, Buonapartes, Apollos, and candlesticks. The expression of utter despair in his countenance is admirably portrayed. In other parts of the picture there is much spirit and humour. In colouring it is rich and judicious.

The miniature sketch of the infant Samuel... is one of the sweetest and most delicately painted morsels we have ever seen.

(Wesley and Davis 1828,190)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; tray; images; destruction; urchin; Wellington; Paul Pry; Bonaparte, Apollo; candlesticks; infant Samuel]

Old Bailey: 1828

Thursday – *John Young* was indicted for stealing a miniature statue of Lysippus, from the house of Mr Bailey, the sculptor, Percy Street, Rathbone place.⁵⁶ –From the evidence of Mr Bailey, it appeared that the prisoner had been employed as a workman in his service for some time; but after staying five months with him, he was discharged. Shortly after the statue in question was missed, and it was one to which the prosecutor attached great value, from the circumstance of it being supposed to be executed in the time of Pericles, which would make it about 2,700 years old.⁵⁷ –On search being made at the prisoner’s lodgings, his wife endeavoured to conceal the figure, which was standing on the mantelpiece, from the officer who made the search; and in addition to that property of Mr Bailey, several tools and implements for sculpture, also belonging to the prosecutor, were found in the prisoner’s lodgings.

A good deal of curiosity was exhibited on the production of the statue, which was not above four or five inches long, and was composed of bronze. Mr Phillips, who is the wit of the court, made the discovery that it was very *little* for its age.

In defence, the prisoner said that he had found the statue lying among some rubbish in the mews near Mr Baileys; and he had taken it home to give to his children to play with.

The prisoner received a good character, but the jury found him *guilty*.

(*The Examiner*, April 13th, 1828)

[Key words: crime; Lysippus; fake; miniature; figurine; Pericles; mantelpiece; bronze; court; humour]]

Overdoing it: 1829

It happened some time ago, that a lady, living not one hundred miles from “the second city in the kingdom,” had hired a servant, a plain well-

⁵⁵ James Holmes (1777-1860).

⁵⁶ Lysippus was a Greek sculptor active in the 4th century BC. Given the clash of dates and its unlikely identification, the miniature was probably a fake, hence the amusement in the court.

⁵⁷ Pericles was a Greek leader during its “golden age,” 495-429 BC.

meaning, though rather ignorant, country girl.⁵⁸ The mistress taking her new handmade on a initiating tour through the house, led her into the drawing room, and told her, that she should expect her to be particularly careful in keeping clean sundry composition ornaments, which decorated the mantelpiece.⁵⁹ The obedient servant determined not to forget the admonition, and also resolved upon giving a specimen of her superior cleanliness. The next morning, having wiped off the dust from these objects of her care, she observed that they retained a yellowish tinge, which she attributed to the carelessness of her predecessor, and that she immediately set about removing. Imagining that an immersion in the pure element would prepare them for the final process [of] purification, she placed them at the bottom of a bottle of water, and left them until its softening influence should render the dusty particles less adhesive. But, alas! the nature of the composition would not sustain the ordeal to which they were subjected, and on the poor girl going to finish her work of renovation, she found, that like “the baseless fabric of a pageant faded,” the artist’s work had dissolved, and left but an unshaped sediment behind.⁶⁰ This accident, which is a fact, should impress the necessity in giving instructions, to adapt them so far to the knowledge and understanding of those to whom they are addressed, that under a well meant endeavour to do their duty, they may not commit some irremediable mistake. *York Courant*.

(*The Sheffield Independent, and Yorkshire and Derbyshire Advertiser*, July 25 1829)

[Key words: ornaments; composition; humour]

The Italian Itinerant: 1830

NOW that the farewell tear is dried,
 Heaven prosper thee, be hope thy guide
 Hope be thy guide, adventurous Boy;
 The wages of thy travel, joy!
 Whether for London bound--to trill
 Thy mountain notes with simple skill;
 Or on thy head to poise a show
 Of Images in seemly row;
 The graceful form of milk-white Steed,
 Or Bird that soared with Ganymede;
 Or through our hamlets thou wilt bear
 The sightless Milton, with his hair
 Around his placid temples curled;
 And Shakspeare at his side—a freight,
 If clay could think and mind were weight,
 For him who bore the world!⁶¹

(Wordsworth 1830)

[Key words: Italian; boy; tray; London; images; Pegasus;
 Ganymede; Milton; Shakespeare; Atlas]

⁵⁸ The “second city” was Birmingham

⁵⁹ “Composition” was another description of Plaster of Paris.

⁶⁰ “The baseless fabric of a pageant faded,” is a misquotation from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Act 4 Scene 1.

⁶¹ The “milk-white Steed” was probably a play on the white plaster and, perhaps, Pegasus? The “Bird that soared with Ganymede” was Zeus, in the form of an eagle; Busts of Milton invariably show his hair as being long and curly; “Shakspeare” was a common spelling in the nineteenth century, when busts of Shakespeare and Milton were very popular

Madame Vestris's legs: 1831

VESTRIS'S LEGS.—Thomas Papera was indicted on Tuesday for stealing a variety of casts in plaster of Paris, value 2s. 6d., the property of James Millett Papera and partner. The principal article alleged to be stolen was a cast of Madame Vestris's leg. The evidence not being sufficient to support the charge, the prisoner was acquitted.

(*The Spectator*, February 26th 1831, 13)

[Key words: Papera; plaster; Madame Vestris; leg; crime; court]]

[Henry Heath: Etching with hand-colouring 1831, Figure A2.4]

The interior of a modeller's studio or storehouse, with many plaster casts, some from the antique. They include a huge torso, a goat, a Venus, and busts. An elderly and grotesquely ugly man, in old-fashioned dress, with a rat-tail queue and Hessian boots, stands in profile to the right, leaning on his cane. He inspects through a lorgnette, grinning pruriently, casts of a pair of woman's legs (those of Mme Vestris). He says: 'Beautiful! beautiful! no doubt equal to the Originals, but the Pair would be too much for me.—I wish some kind friend would divide them with me'. Below the design:

Oh Cunning P.— thou'rt perfect Master,
Of taking forms in Paris Plaister:
And woe unto the Man betide,
Who would such legs as these divide!
Sweet M—d—m V— would soon discover,
If you sold one without the Other!⁶²

(British Museum catalogue description)

[Key words: Madam Vestris; legs; Venus; plaster of Paris;
humour; satire]

Body snatching: 1831

On Saturday, another case of the above description came to light, and created an indescribable sensation throughout London. Four fellows, of body snatching notoriety, named May, Bishop, Williams, and Shean, offered the body of a lad for sale at King's College; but the freshness of the body, and a severe wound over one of the eyes, gave rise to suspicion, which, after a good deal of manoeuvring, ended in the apprehension of the 4 ruffians. The corpse has since been ascertained to be that of an Italian image boy, who had for several weeks rambled about the streets almost destitute, his master having left England in September last. It was recognised by a great many persons. A *post mortem* examination was taken on the following day, before 4 medical gentlemen, who came to the conclusion, that "the appearance of the eyes, lips, and wound on the head, all clearly proved that the boy came to his death by violence. He was apparently about 12 years of age, and had previously been in a good state of health." The prisoners, who said they had got the body from Guy's

⁶² "P---" was Thomas Papera; "M—d—m V—" was Madame Vestris

Hospital, underwent examinations on Saturday and Monday, and were remanded till Wednesday, to await the results of the coroner's inquest.⁶³

(*Newcastle Courant*, November 12th 1831)

[Key words: Italian; image boy; master; body snatching; crime]

THE GHOST OF NAPOLEON: 1832

At the Mansion-house, on Saturday, M. Pierre De Bois, a French gentleman, who resides in Chambers in Leadenhall-street, was summoned before the Lord Mayor for beating Rafoel Spaglietti, an image-seller, and breaking a very fine bust of Napoleon Buonaparte. It appeared that the Italian went up stairs to the defendant's room door, at the top of which there was glass; he raised up the head of the image, which was made of pale clay, to the glass, and said softly, "buy my ghost of Napoleon." M. De Bois, who had known the Emperor, thought he saw his ghost, and exclaiming, "Oh, Christ, save us!" fell on the floor in a fit. The Italian, seeing no chance of a sale that day, went away, and returned the next. M. De Bois, in the meantime, having recovered from his fit, and hearing how his terror had been excited, felt so indignant, the moment he saw Spaglietti at his door the next day he flew at him, and tumbled him and the Emperor down stairs together. It happened that a confectioner's man was at that moment coming up stairs with a gible pie, to a Mr. Wilson, who resided in the Chambers, and the Emperor and Italian, in their descent, alighted on his tray, which broke their fall, and saved the Italian's head, but could not save Napoleon's, which was totally destroyed: the gible pie also suffered so much from the collision, that Mr. Wilson refused to have anything to do with it. After a good deal of explanation amongst the parties, and a good deal of laughter amongst the auditors, M. De Bois agreed to pay for the pie, and Mr. Wilson generously paid for the loss of the Emperor.

(*The Morning Chronicle*, January 16th 1832)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; Napoleon; bust; humour; crime; court]

The Italian Image-Boy: 1832

Yonder black eyed, sun-burnt urchin is too diminutive to be Atlas carrying the heavens on his shoulders; but I am strongly tempted to suspect that it is his youngest son, whom, in imitation of his fathers orbiferous exploit, has popped Mount Olympus upon his head, and walked fairly off with it. The rogue has not had time to purloin the woods, caves, and grottos; but he has made a sweeping abduction of the celestials who haunted its summit, and constituted the court of Jupiter. There they are, owing their immortality, immortals though they be, to these plaster casts, –the most delightful of all inventions, the printing of sculpture, which, diffusing and perpetuating the glorious works of Phineas and Praxiteles, enables us to place celestials upon our shelves, to set up a gallery, and keep a Mount Olympus of our own, at the expense of a few shillings. An Image Boy is the last lingering remnant of Paganism. Heavens! What a train of classical association streams from his various figures, elevating and spiritualising the very air as he walks along! His board is a moving world, carrying its own atmosphere

⁶³ The boy was identified as Carlo Ferrari, and his murderers were sentenced to death (Bishop and Williams) and transportation (May, who died in Tasmania).

of thought with it,—ay, and of sweet and profitable thought too, for is it not pleasant to reflect how the imaginative and the beautiful, yielding a perpetual source of delight to their admirers of all ages and religions, survive the mythology that first called them into being;—how the perishable marble, renewed by still more fragile plaster, preserves the memory of the defunct immortal that it represents;— how the diversity of genius in a human artist may make a celestial indebted to his endurance to a mortal?

[...]

You must surely remember, reader, unless the mother of the Muses have deserted you, that a few years ago our English modellers carried about an wretched collection of painted plaster dolls, lions, monsters, shapeless allegorical nondescripts, with here and there a sprawling whole-length cross-legged Milton or Shakespeare stiffly leaning over a tablet on which was inscribed an extract from their respective works.

[...]

“Buy any image! Buy any image.” Oh! Here comes the boy again; So that if the reader be unprovided, he may now supply himself. There are several other busts, you see, besides those we have mentioned. Our itinerant has as many heads as a Hydra. Byron is there with his scornful lip, who having sung the beauties and the wrongs of Greece, and died upon her soil, seems to be not inappropriately placed amidst her poets and divinities, and the masterpieces of her ancient sculptors, to whom we have been indebted for those heads of Homer, Socrates, and Sappho. Mingled not incongruously with the latter, — for genius and benevolence being kindred and cognate wherever they are to be found, are of no age, no country, or rather of all, forming an illustrious brotherhood together,—you may perceive the bust of Canning, the enlightened statesman;—Franklin, the American philosopher;—of Voltaire, the witty and the naughty, but ever the amusing satirist. Our Image Boy is impartial. Provided his heads be popular, he cares not whose they are, nor whence they come. His board is a sort of Pantheon for the divine minds, the intellectual heroes and demigods, the inheritors of fame of every clime and epoch.

[...]

But I must pay and dismiss our Image Boy, or I shall moralize him into more fancies than ever Jaques did the wounded stag.⁶⁴— What is your name, friend?— Nasoni, Signor.⁶⁵—I thought as much: a descendent, I doubt not, of the political exile of Tomos, for you he wears the hereditary nose, though he may have dropped the family name of Ovid.⁶⁶ The gods and goddesses whom his industrious ancestor carried *in* his head, the juvenile descendant carries *on* his head. What a new fund of associations! And what a pity that I have neither time to follow them up!— There is your money friend, and I pray thee to be gone quickly, I shall buy and scribble about thee and thy figures until we have neither of us an image left.

(Smith 1832, 12-27)

⁶⁴ A misspelt reference to Jacques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, who laments at length the wounding of a stag

⁶⁵ “Big Nose”

⁶⁶ “Tomos” = Tomis, on the Black Sea. Ovid's family name was Naso, which translates as “nose.” This has often led to the suggestion that Ovid had a large nose, but this is disputed, and the nasal over-abundance may have belonged to an ancestor.

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; boy; images; plaster; dolls; lions; monsters, Milton; Shakespeare; Byron Greece; Homer; Socrates; Sappho; Canning; Franklin; Voltaire; pantheon]

Wandering Italians: 1833

The attention of most of our readers must have been excited by the poor Italian boys that frequent our streets, selling images, playing organs, or exhibiting monkeys, land tortoises, and white mice. This numerous class is found, and generally in greater numbers than with us, in France, in Germany, even in Russia, and in other continental countries. They are not less remarkable on account of their dark expressive countenances, and picturesque appearance, than from their quiet, inoffensive conduct. It is very rare to find in any one of the many countries to which these wanderers repair, a single proof of a crime or serious offence of any kind committed by them. This is a circumstance them the more to be wondered that, as they for the most part leave their homes in very tender years, are frequently exposed to the privations and temptations of extreme poverty. Those among them who are venders of images, by selling for a few pence the plaster busts of great men and casts from ancient works of art, may pretend to the dignity of traders, and even have the merit of improving and propagating a taste for the fine arts...As a body, if they are to be held as vagrants, they must be considered as the most inoffensive and amusing of vagrants.

The venders of images come almost without exception from the territory of Lucca, in Tuscany, not many miles from Florence. The way in which their company is formed is this: – one, or sometimes two men, who possess the art of casting figures in moulds, propose a campaign; and having collected a number of poor boys, of whom they become the captains, leave their native valley and cross the Apennines and the Alps marching in a little corps of ten, twelve, or fifteen. [...] Their moulds or forms, with a few tools, had been despatched before them by the wagon to Chambery, the capital city of Savoy, where they proposed to make their first sojourn. They find the plaster and other simple materials requisite for the formation of their figures, in nearly every large town to which they go; and they never fix their quarters for any length of time, excepting in large towns. On arriving, therefore, at Chambery, the artist, or the principal of this company, having received his moulds, would set to work, despatching the boys who were with him through the city and the little towns and villages in the neighbourhood, to sell the figures which he could rapidly make. When the distance permitted, these boys would return at night with the fruits of the day's sale to their master, who lodged and fed them; but it would often happen, when they took a wider range among the mountains and valleys of Savoy, they would be absent for several days, under which circumstances they would themselves purchased their cheap food and shelter out of the money they might obtain for the goods they disposed of. When the market became languid in and about Chambery; the master would pack off his moulds and tools for Geneva, and follow them on foot with his little troop, each of whom would carry some few figures to sell at the towns and villages on the road to that city. At Geneva, he would do as he had done at Chambery; and when that neighbourhood was supposed to be supplied, he would transfer himself and his assistants in the same way to some other place.

(Anon 1833, 42).

[Key words: Italian; boys; images; France; Germany; Russia; behaviour; poverty; plaster; busts; taste; education; art]

Good likenesses: 1834

Antonio Caracel, an Italian image-hawker, charged a cab-driver with having committed wholesale destruction upon his stock in trade, consisting of a great number of Napoleon's and Wellington's head, and the heads of others who were illustrious in other respects.

The complainant stated that the public patronised him considerably in consequence of his general display of good likenesses, and that so sure as a customer bought the head of one warrior, so sure did the purchase of the head of the other follow. This was particularly the case in the city. Having received an order, he was walking along with about thirty heads on his shoulders, when the cabman, pretending to whip his horses, sent his lash in amongst them, and whipped them all off, as if he had been a common executioner. The cabman then, with characteristic good-feeling, whipped his horses most violently; but the indignation of the store-keeper, who witnessed the transaction, prevented him from whipping himself off.

The defendant said that he had calculated injudiciously upon the length of his whip in laying on upon his horses, and accidentally displaced the heads. He really meant no harm to the poor Italian, and was very sorry for the accident.

The complainant said that if the cabman consented to pay him for the actual money he was out of pocket, he should be convinced the affair was a mere accident; but that if no recompense was offered it would certainly bear all the symptoms of wilfulness, and ought to be punished accordingly.

The Lord Mayor approved of this view of the case, and advised the cabman to avoid a greater difficulty, by subscribing to the proposed terms.

The defendant said that business was very indifferent indeed, or he would pay the image seller at once. He should, however, endeavour to let him have the amount of the loss, which the poor foreigner estimated at 20 shillings, at the rate of threepence a week.

The Lord Mayor admired this modest and liberal proposition; but said the cabman must pay two shillings a week or go to prison.

The defendant, in order to avoid the more severe alternative, consented to the arrangement; and his Lordship set up the Italian in trade up on the spot, upon the promise of the latter to refund on being remunerated by the driver.

(*The Morning Chronicle*, June 19th 1834) (London)

[Key words: Italian image; hawker; Napoleon; Wellington; value]

Buy images: 1834

[Leigh Hunt]

'Buy images!' Who ever hears the cry now-a-days without turning to the moving miniature sculpture gallery, and looking upwards to discover what new treasure of old art has been rendered accessible to eye and pocket?

And again when the collection has been thoroughly scanned, who does not turn to the itinerant Italian boy to read in his eyes that lesson so are necessary to be studied in an age when an Archbishop refuses sanctuary to

the remains of a musical composer, and a magistrate a license to a theatre, – that a thorough appreciation of art of every kind is one of the surest safeguards of the spirituality of people. Look at the faces of the Italian boys; watch their glances of expressive admiration– nay, affection–for the objects of their occupation; hear their eloquent description of the different works of art with which they are familiar; and then compare them with the ragged urchins who infest your gates, with thievish eye and harsh voices, crying ‘h-a-arth-stone!’ till your ‘hearthstone’ is no longer a place of quiet refuge,– and in that contrast you will have the whole difference between the marble of the sculptor and the rough stone of the quarry, a nation with or without the influence of the master–spirit which lives and breathes throughout the creations of glorious art. How many of these sun-tinted dark-eyed wanderers from the south have we not encountered, all with some individual charm, some touch of spirit to animate their clay, as the soul of the sculptor had animated the forms with which their pursuit had made them acquainted. One would sing Venetian barcarolles, another recite portions of the ‘Gierusalemme Liberata,’ in no very precise Italian, be it confessed; but when a copy was handed to him, he has gone over stanza after stanza, rapidly turning the leaves, until his eye caught and kindled at some old known favourite, and he has wrapped himself up with the book in a state of unconscious enthusiasm, till the close of the admired passage has brought in back to himself. There was one whom we remember from amongst many others, who stands out more vividly than the rest. He came one early autumn morning; there had been a heavy rain that had afterwards cleared off to make the remaining day brighter from the contrast. The sun came out, and birds began to sing, and the blue of the sky was deep and clear, and soon there came a voice to match it, sounding down the grove, ‘buy images!’– a cry never disregarded–and the travelling artist was stopped, and he bent his head, with its weight of white beauties, beneath the laburnum tree that overarched the gateway, and came smiling at the gravel path, and rested them upon the iron palisades of the stone steps. He was freshly complexioned, a thing unusual to boys of his class and country...

(*The Monthly Repository* 1834, 756)

[Key words: Italian; boys; art; cry]

The Irish Image-Man: 1835

Who will buy a bronze image? A choice composition!
An ornament prime for a hall or a shelf:
'Tis fitted to charm every rank and condition;
And, by all that's unlucky I made it myself.

Come, who'll buy an image! Just look at the figure;
Its features so talented naught can surpass.
'Tis the bust of a patriot of virtue and vigour,
And I'll warrant the bust is of genuine brass.

Come, who'll buy a bargain? The big agitator!
Come bid for the darling, and don't be asleep –
The pride of ould Ireland! the eloquent prater;
Yet I'll sell him a bargain uncommonly cheap.

Come, customers, why do you need to be spurr'd on;

Do buy Dan O'Connell, and down with your dust:
Faith I wish from my heart I was rid of my burden;
Why the plague did I make such a troublesome bust.

Of luck in my life I may boast of a sprinkling;
For straightforward dealing is always my plan:
I disposed of the great Bonaparte in a twinkling,
But cannot get rid of this bothering Dan.

Into pieces I wish to my heart I could break him,
For then I might wander in comfort and ease.
What in Heaven or on earth could induce me to make him,
Like Frankenstein's monster, his maker to tease?

Come, who'll buy an Irish man sturdy and steady?
I fear I shall hawk about Daniel in vain!
Prime soldiers I've moulded who brought me the ready;
But I'll ne'er try my hand upon Patriots again.

Then who'll buy an image? A choice composition!
An ornament formed for a hall or a shelf;
'Tis fitted to charm every rank and condition,
And, by all that's unlucky, I made it myself!

(*Bell's Life* October 11th 1835)

[Key words: humour; satire; politics; O'Connell]

Strange: 1836

[From *Jerningham; or, the Inconsistent Man*]

By the by, did you see the other day that, when the football took the unwarrantable liberty of sweeping all the gods, goddesses, Kings, philosophers and politicians off the head of that poor Italian image vender, Leicester came forward immediately, and paid 15 shillings out of his own pocket, as compensation, though he was not one of the players, which we all thought very strange.

(Kaye 1836, 61)

[Key words: Italian; image vender; gods; goddesses; kings; philosophers; politicians; value]

Spitting himself: 1836

—farmer's girl and farmer's boy on the mantelpiece: girl tumbling over a stile, and boy spitting himself, on the handle of a pitchfork—long white dimity curtains in the window—and, in short, everything on the most genteel scale imaginable.

(Dickens 1836)

[Key words: mantelpiece; farm girl; farm boy; gentility]

NATURE AND ART: 1837

“Buy my images!”

“Art improves nature,” is an old proverb which our forefathers adopted without reflection, and obstinately adhered to as lovers of consistency. The capacity and meshes of their brain were too small to hold many great

truths, but they caught a great number of little errors, and this was one. They bequeathed it to their children and their children's children, who inherited it until they threw away the wisdom of their ancestors with their wigs; left off hair powder; and are now leaving off the sitting in hot clubrooms, for the sake of sleep, and exercise in the fresh air. There seems to be a general insurrection against the unnatural improvement of nature. We let ourselves and our trees grow out of artificial forms, and no longer sit in artificial arbours, with entrances like that of the cavern at Blackheath hill, or, as we may even still see them, if we pay our last visit to the dying beds of a few old tea gardens.⁶⁷ We know more than those who lived before us, and if we're not happier, we are on the way to be so. Wisdom is happiness; but "he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow."⁶⁸ Knowledge is not wisdom; it is only the rough material of wisdom. It must be shaped by reflection and judgement, before it can be constructed into an edifice fitting for the mind to dwell in, and take up its rest. This, as our old discoursers used to say, "brings us to our subject."

"Buy my images!" or "Pye m'imatches," was, and is, a "London cry", by Italian lads carrying boards on their heads, with plaster figures for sale. "In my time," one of these "images" (it usually occupied a corner of the board) was a "Polly"—

This representative of the most "popular" of "all the winged inhabitants of the air," might have been taken for the likeness of some species between an owl and the booby-bird; but then the wings and back were coloured with a lively green, and the under part had yellow streaks, and the beak was of a red colour, and any colour did for the eyes, if they were larger than they ought to have been.⁶⁹ "In my time" too, there was an "image" of a "fine bow pot," consisting of half a dozen green shapes like halbert tops for "make-believe" leaves, spreading like a half opened fan, from a knot "that was not," inasmuch as it was delicately concealed by a tawny coloured ball called an orange, which pretended to rest on a clumsy clump of yellowed plaster as on the mouth of a jar— the whole looking as unlike a nosegay in water as possible.⁷⁰ Then, too, there was a sort of obelisk with a irregular projections and curves; the top, being smaller than the bottom, was marked out with paint into a sort of face, and, by the device of divers colours, it was bonneted, armed, waisted, and petticoated— this was called a "fine lady."

A lengthened mass became by colourable show, "a dog"— like ingenuity might have tortured it into a devil. The feline race were of two shapes and in three sizes; the middle one— like physic in a bottle, "when taken, to be well shaken," moved its chalk head, to the wonder and delight of all urchins, until they informed themselves of its "springs of action," at the price of "only a penny," and, by breaking it, discovered that the nodding knob achieved un-cat-like motion, by being hung with a piece of wire to the interior of its hollow body. The lesser cat was not so *very* small, considering its price — "a farthing:"— I speak of when battered button tops represented that plentiful "coin of the realm." Then there was the largest

⁶⁷ The "cavern at Blackheath hill" refers to Jack Cade's Cavern, Blackheath, rediscovered in c1780.

⁶⁸ Ecclesiastes 1:18.

⁶⁹ "All the winged inhabitants of the air" is from Genesis 1:20; A "booby-bird" = sea bird.

⁷⁰ A "bow pot" (bouquet pot) was a small pot containing artificial flowers; "halbert tops: axe-shaped

The present representation favours the image too much. Neither this engraving, nor that of the parrot, is sufficiently like— the artist says he “could not draw it bad enough.” what an abominable deficiency is the want of “an eye”— heigho! Then there were so many things, that were not likenesses of anything which they were “images,” and so many years and cares have rolled over my head and heart, that I’ve not recollection or time enough for their description. They are all gone, or going—“going out” or “gone out” for ever! Personal remembrance is the frail and only memorial of the existence of some of these “ornaments” of the humble abodes of former times.

The masterpieces on the board of the “image man” were “a pair”— at that time “matchless.” They linger yet, at the extreme corners of a few mantelpieces, with probably a “sampler” between, and, over that, a couple of feathers from Juno’s bird, gracefully adjusted into a St Andrew’s cross—their two gorgeous eyes giving out “beautiful colours,” to the beautiful eyes of innocent children. The “images,” spoken of as still in being, are of the colossal height of eighteen inches, more or less: they personate the “human form devine,” and were designed, perhaps, by Hayman, but their moulds are so worn that the casts are unfeatured, and they barely retain their bodily semblance.⁷¹ They are always painted black, save that a scroll on each, which depends from a kind of altar, is left white. One of the inscriptions says,

“Into the heaven of heavens I have presumed, &c.”⁷² and all, except the owners, admire the presumption. The “effigy” looks as though the man had been up the chimney, and instead of having “drawn empyrean air” had taken a glass too much of Hodges’s “Imperial,” and wrapped himself in the soot-bag to conceal his indulgence and his person—this is Milton.⁷³ The other, in like sables, points to his inscription, beginning,

“The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces, &c.”
is an “insubstantial pageant” of “the immortal Shakespeare,”
“cheated of feature by dissembling nature,”
through the operation of time.⁷⁴
“Such were the *forms* that o’er the *incrusted souls*
Of our forefathers scatter’d *found delight*.”⁷⁵

Price, and Alison, and Knight, have generalized “taste” for high-life; while those of the larger circle have acquired “taste” from manifold representations and vehicles of instruction, and comprehend the outlines, if they do not take in the details of natural objects.⁷⁶ This is manifested by the almost universal disuse of the “images” described. With the inhabitants of the district in the metropolis, agreeable forms are now absolute requisites, and the demand has induced their supply. There are, perhaps, as many casts from the Medicean Venus, Apollo Belvidere, Antonious, the Gladiator, and other beauties of ancient sculpture, within the parish of St.

⁷¹ “Human form devine” quotes William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*; Francis Hayman, 1708-1776, English artist.

⁷² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

⁷³ “Empyrean air” is a quote from *Paradise Lost*;

⁷⁴ “Gorgeous palaces” and “insubstantial pageant” are from Shakespeare, *The Tempest*; Samuel Johnson referred to “the immortal Shakespeare” in *Prologue Spoken at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury-Lane (1740)*; “cheated of feature by dissembling nature” is from Shakespeare, *Richard III*.

⁷⁵ I have been unable to find the source of this quotation, though it is also reproduced in Goodman 1845, 261.

⁷⁶ Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1796; Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, 1790; Richard Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, 1805.

George, in the East, as in the Parish of St. George, Hanover-square.⁷⁷ They are repositied over the fireplaces, or on the tables, of neighbourhoods, wherein the uncouth cat, and the barbarous parrot were, even “in *my* time” desirable “images.” The moulds of the greater number of these deformities, are probably destroyed. It was with difficulty that the “cat” could be obtained for the preceding column, and an “image” of the “parrot” was not procurable from an “image man.” Invention has been resorted to for the gratification of popular desire: two plaster cast of children published in the autumn of 1825, have met with unparalleled sale. To record the period of their origin they are represented in the annexed engraving, and, perhaps, they may be so perpetuated when the casts themselves shall have disappeared, in favour of others more elegant.

The “common people” have become uncommon;
 A few remain, just here and there, the rest
 Are polished and refined: child, man, and woman,
 All, imitate the manners of the best;
 Picking up, sometimes, good things from their betters,
 As they have done from them. And they have books:
 As t’was design’d they should, when taught their letters;
 In nature’s self befriends their very looks:
 And all this must, and all this ought to be—
 The only use of eyes, I know of, is – to *see*.

When these agreeable figures first appeared, the price obtained for them was four shillings.⁷⁸ As the sales slackened they were sold for three shillings: now, in March, 1826, the pair may be bought for two shillings, or eighteen pence.⁷⁹ The consequence of this cheapness is, that there is scarcely a house without them.

There can be no doubt that society is improving in every direction. As I hinted before, we have a great deal to learn, and something to unlearn. It is in many respects untrue, that “art improves nature;” while in many important respects it is certain, that “nature improves art.”

(Hone 1837, 310)

[Key words: Italian; images; parrot; bow pot; lady; dog; cat; nodder; pairs; Venus de Medici; Apollo Belvedere; Antonius; boys reading and writing]

Signs of the Times: 1838

We yesterday met in Lord-street an Italian image-seller, with a full-sized bust of the Queen in one arm, and one of equal dimensions of Dan O’Connell in the other.⁸⁰ Walking up over a little higher we met another image-man carrying a similar pair of busts. ‘To what base uses may we come Horatio,’ may her Majesty indeed exclaim with the poet, at finding herself ranked in such company—Ib.⁸¹

(*The Blackburn Standard*, September 12th 1838)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; busts; Queen Victoria; Daniel O’Connor]

⁷⁷ “Medicean Venus” = Venus de Medici; “Apollo Belvidere” = Apollo of the Belvedere, Vatican Museum; “Antonius” = Marcus Antonius; “the Gladiator” = (probably) the Borghese Gladiator, The Louvre; “St George in the East” = Hawksmoor church in working-class east London; “St George Hanover Square” = a fashionable and affluent area of central London.

⁷⁸ These figures are still available today, though now moulded in resin, (Gino Ruggeri, Tuscany) and costing about £60.00 for the pair.

⁷⁹ In today’s values, an 1826 shilling would be worth about £4.00. (<<http://safalra.com/other/historical-uk-inflation-price-conversion/>>)

⁸⁰ Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847) Irish political leader who campaigned for the repeal of the Act of Union and Catholic Emancipation.

⁸¹ Shakespeare: Hamlet, Act 5 Scene 1.

Art: 1839

There are, to be sure, individuals who would prefer the contents of the show-board of an itinerant Italian image vender to the frieze of the Parthenon; but such a circumstance will not prove the inferiority of the one description of art, and the superiority of the other.

(*Art Union* 1839, 210)

[Key words: Italian; image vender; art]

Rude and inferior multiplications: 1839

MANY of our readers have probably seen a reduced and restored copy of the Elgin friezes, which is to be met with in the collections of most lovers of Art; while rude and inferior multiplications of the same may frequently be found on the well-laden shelf owned by the peripatetic Italian image-seller:

(*Art Journal* Vol 1(1) 1839)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; art]

The Victoria Mania: 1839

I walked on [in Philadelphia] and met a man with a tray on his head, full of plaster images, among which “her Majesty’s” bust was very prominent.

(*The Madisionian*, July 3rd 1839) (Washington DC)

[Key words: tray; plaster; images; Queen Victoria; busts]

Poor countrymen: 1840

All the little savings of her pocket-money were carefully hoarded up, to be bestowed upon her mother’s poor countrymen, as she called the Italian image-sellers and wandering minstrels, whom she encountered in her daily promenades round Portman Square; and not unfrequently did she incur a reprimand for the impropriety of her conduct, in lingering for a moment to regale her ear with the sweet sounds of “il cielo la rendi il merito,” or “la santa Madre di Dio la benedica,” which richly rewarded her for any self-denial the gift might have cost her.⁸²

(Anon 1840, 25)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; busts; Queen Victoria; Daniel O’Connor]

Painted parrots: 1840

The days of highland romance are entirely gone. Instead of seeing the bonneted chieftain with his claymore, or even a kilted billy, striding down the braes, your musings are broken in upon by the apparition of an Italian image-seller, resting beneath the tufted rock by the wayside, and who is on an expedition to disseminate painted parrots and Bonapartes over the country of Rob Roy and Maccullamore.⁸³

(Chambers and Chambers 1840, 89)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; parrots; Bonaparte]

⁸² “Il cielo la rendi il merito” = “May Heaven reward you;” “la santa Madre di Dio la benedica” = “may the Holy Mother of God bless you”

⁸³ The Duke of Argyle, who fought against Charles at Culloden.

A good customer: 1840

[Darley Fight] had a large summerhouse erected at the top of the large field leading from the river, and on the top of this building he placed a large image representing some celebrity or animal, which was changed every few weeks for a new one of different character, the dismantled one been broken up and thrown into the river. He must have been a good customer to some of the Italian image sellers who are that time frequently came round carrying a large board on which were plaster images of various kinds.

(Dyson 1840)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; plaster; images]

The slumb'ring boy: 1842

Lines, occasioned by seeing an Italian image boy asleep on a doorstep in London with his face turned towards the morning sun.

By Mrs Gore

Yea, sun thyself!— and may the morning beam
 Cheer thy young blood,— Italianize thy dream,—
 Bring to thy weary home-sick heart again
 That sad-hued olive-grounds, the golden plain —
 The roving vines, flung wild from tree to tree—
 The orange-blooms, that drown the pilfering bee—
 The pine-wood, darkening o'er the distant hill—
 The gleaming lake, in snatches, calm and still,
 Pure, as though Heaven, impatient of her hue,
 Had shed on Earth a fragment brightly blue;—
 The white-wall'd hamlets, dotted o'er the land—
 The hum of men, exchanging, hand-in-hand,
 Greetings in thy land's language, soft and fond,
 To which thy kindling heart's quick throbs respond;—
 The convent-bell, tolling the Angelus,—
 The wayside shrine of Him who died for us,
 Where thy young brethren, pausing in their play,
 Lift up their little swarthy hands to pray,
 Still naming in their prayers the exile far away!

Yea, sun thyself, and sleep!—by pitying Heaven,
 Thus to thy rugged lot be comfort given!
 While around thee brawls, unnoticed and unseen,
 Soot-suited London's grim and harsh routine;
 The rumbling wheels, — the cries of petty trade,—
 The coarse rebuke of pride, in oaths convey'd,—
 The hollow laugh of meretricious joy,—
 The ribald jest, that mocks the slumb'ring boy, —
 All— all the vulgar clamours that enhance
 The dreariest city under Heaven's expense,—
 Oh! Let them howl, unheeded!— 'mid them all,
 While on thy head these rays of mercy fall,
 Dream of thy home — thy sunbright home — afar —
 And bear with what thou art, — *and what we are!*

(*Ainsworths Magazine* 1842, 317)

The Image Boy: 1841

WHOE'ER has truded on frequent feet,
 From Charing Cross to Ludgate Street,
 That haunt of noise and wrangle,
 Has seen on journeying through the Strand,
 A foreign Image-vender stand
 Near Somerset's quadrangle.⁸⁴

His coal-black eye, his balanced walk,
 His sable apron, white with chalk,
 His listless meditation,
 His curly locks, his sallow cheeks,
 His board of celebrated Greeks,
 Proclaim his trade and nation.⁸⁵

Not on that board, as erst, are seen
 A tawdry troop; our gracious Queen,
 With tresses like a carrot,
 A milk-maid with a pea-green pail,
 A poodle with a golden tail,
 John Wesley, and a parrot;⁸⁶—

No, far more classic is his stock;
 With ducal Arthur, Milton, Locke,
 He bears, unconscious roamer,
 Alcmena's Jove-begotten Son,
 Cold Abelard's too tepid Nun,
 And pass-supported Homer.⁸⁷

See yonder bust adorn'd with curls;
 'Tis hers, the Queen who melted pearls
 Marc Antony to wheedle.
 Her bark, her banquets, all are fled;
 And Time, who cut her vital thread,
 Has only spared her Needle.⁸⁸

Stern Neptune, with his triple prong,
 Childe Harold, peer of peerless song,
 So frolic Fortune wills it,
 Stand next the Son of crazy Paul,
 Who hugg'd the intrusive King of Gaul
 Upon a raft at Tilsit.⁸⁹

“Poor vagrant child of want and toil!
 The sun that warms thy native soil
 Has ripen'd not thy knowledge;

⁸⁴ Somerset House.

⁸⁵ “Chalks” = Plaster of Paris figures, which were often called “chalkware;” “celebrated Greeks” = figures of Greek gods, heroes and mythological figures.

⁸⁶ “Our gracious Queen” = Queen Victoria, a very popular figurine.

⁸⁷ “Alcmena's Jove-begotten Son” = Heracles; “Abelard's too tepid Nun” = Heloise.

⁸⁸ “The Queen who melted pearls” = Cleopatra, whose “needle” stands beside the River Thames in London.

⁸⁹ “Son of crazy Paul” = Tsar Alexander I; “the intrusive King of Gaul” = Napoleon.

'Tis obvious, from that vacant air,
Though Padua gave thee birth, thou ne'er
Didst graduate in her College.⁹⁰

"'Tis true thou nam'st thy motley freight:
But from what source their birth they date,
Mythology or history,
Old records, or the dreams of youth,
Dark fable, or transparent truth,
Is all to thee a mystery.

"Come tell me, Vagrant, in a breath,
Alcides' birth, his life, his death,
Recount his dozen labours:
Homer thou know'st; but of the woes
Of Troy thou'rt ignorant as those
Dark Orange-boys thy neighbours,"⁹¹

'Twas thus, erect, I deigned to pour
My shower of lordly pity o'er
The poor Italian wittol,
As men are apt to do, to show
Their vantage-ground o'er those who know
Just less than their own little.⁹²

When lo, methought Prometheus' flame
Waved o'er a bust of deathless fame,
And woke to life Childe Harold:
The Bard aroused me from my dream
Of pity, alias self-esteem,
And thus indignant caroll'd; —

'O thou, who thus, in numbers pert
And petulent, presum'st to flirt
With Memory's Nine Daughters:
Whose verse the next trade-winds that blow
Down narrow Paternoster-row
Shall 'whelm in Lethe's waters.'⁹³

"Slight is the difference I see
Between yon Paduan youth and thee;
He moulds, of Paris plaster,
An urn by classic Chantrey's laws, —
And thou a literary vase
Of would-be alabaster."⁹⁴

"Were I to arbitrate betwixt
"His terra cotta, plain or mix'd,

⁹⁰ The poet is either using artistic licence here or has confused his geography. Almost all image sellers came from Tuscany. "Her College" = University of Padua.

⁹¹ Jewish street boys sold oranges until displaced by Irish immigrants.

⁹² "Wittol," a term of contempt = cuckold.

⁹³ "'Whelm in Lethe's waters" = forget.

⁹⁴ Grecian urns were popular ornaments; Francis Leggatt Chantrey (1781-1841) was a noted sculptor of celebrated people.

And thy earth-gender'd sonnet.
 Small cause has he th'award to dread: —
 Thy images are in the head,
 And his, poor boy, are on it!"

(James Smith 1841, 243)

[Key words: Queen Victoria; milk maid; poodle; Wesley; parrot;
 Arthur; Milton; Locke; Heracles; Heloise; Homer; Cleopatra; Neptune;
 Harold; Tsar Alexander I; Napoleon; Italian]

Buy my Images: 1842

Buy My Images

Written and Sung by
 Mr. Thomas Hudson

Will you buy Images? I Images cry,
 Very fine very pretty, very cheap will you buy?
 Poor Italiano him never in de glooms
 All sort Images beautiful your rooms.
 First one Prima LORD BYRON head,
 BYRON live longtimes after him dead
 Loves tales Poeta-all very true one,
 Every body's knows him call DON JUAN,
 Will you buy Images? I Images cry
 Very fine very pretty-cheap-will you buy?
 Poor Italiano better laugh as cry,
 Will you buy Images? very cheap, will you buy?

Dis Image one is MISTER SHAKISPEAR
 Any prices charge you not pays dear
 He go to High Park and steal a de Deer
 Him work Play live more as Two hundred year
 Every bodys know as take a de pains
 To goes to Common Gardens and Drury Lanes
 He make a you laugh and he make a you cry
 Oftens dey murder him yet he never die.
 Buy my Images.

Nex' Image here dere come in de lot
 Very great Novelstist-name WALER SCOTT
 In prosa-in rima-never got greater
 Him SCOTT too by names and by nature
 So fas' make Libro-all write his own
 Fus't was call him de Large not known
 When discover himself-all delighted
 Jus' fore he die he was be Knighted.
 Buy my Images.

Dis Image here was nobody spurn
 Nother Scotch Poet you read ROBERT BURN
 Poeta la Natura 'stonishing how
 Him write and song wis follow de Plough
 Him when alive Scotch clever confess

So leave him starve and die on distress
 Now Scotch says wis national glows
 BURN ! greatest genius world ever knows !!!
 Buy my Images.

Dis de GREAT MILTON wis a bad wife cross
 So compose himself for PARADISE LOSS
 When wife dies dat ease some pains
 So sit down to wrote PARADISE REGAINS
 Him great scholars wis wonderful mind
 And see very clears wis eyes all blind
 No let him daughters learn Latin stuff
 One tongues for womans him says tis enough Buy my Images.

Here LORD NELSON Inglese man o'war
 Him beat Spain France all both Trafalgar
 When him right arm de battle bereft
 Take sword tother and fight wis left
 Defend Inghilterra wis wooden wall
 Die wis Victory bury him Saint Paul
 Fortys year afters dey finds him loss
 Make de grand monument up Charing Cross
 Buy my Images.

Look a dis Images dis nex' one
 Capitano Generale de LORD WELLINGTON
 Him fight Buonaparte beat him too
 And make fas' run 'way from Waterloo
 Great as a Roman was he to de foes
 Every bodys knows him well by's nose
 Every body trues what every body says
 De greatest man livings alive dis days
 Buy my Images.

Dis PRINCE ALBERT and try all you cans
 You shall never found such a nice young mans
 Queen fall in Loves wis him make stir
 Him Amantissimo fall in Loves Her
 Soon Maritato den he kneel down
 Queen give Prince Albert wis Half a Crown
 Wis Thirtys Thousand a years besides
 For nothing but out wis Queen to rides
 Buy my Images.

Now Finitissimo nex' one seen
 Dis FAIR VICTORIA Old England Queen
 Got two Royal Babies ready for store
 Every years mean haves one little more
 Best Lady for Queen ever could known
 Reign Peoples heart and grace Inglese Throne
 Buy dis Images be Lealta seen
 You not want Sovereign God save de Queen.
 Buy my Images.

A plaster figures seller: 1843

Ein Gipsfiguren Verkäufer

Sarini Geigeri, unstreitig einer der geschicktesten Seiltänzer, produzierte sich neulich auf offenem Markte in Trevino. Ein Gypsfigurenhandler, der gerade vorüber ging, blieb stehen, und sah ihm zu. Er hatte seinen Kram auf dem Kopfe; ein Bret, worauf Napoleon, ein Amor, eine Venus, einige Figuren nach Messerschmidt, und ein wachelnder Zwerg ausgestellt waren. Als von den Anwesenden abgesammelt wurde, wollte sich der Figurenhändler entfernen; allein Sarini rief von Seile herab: Zerschlagt ihm den Kram, wenn er nicht bezahlt; der Kerl zicht mir seit acht Tagen nach, gafft mich an und schleicht fort, wenn er bezahlen soll. Weit Du ein Stümper bist, antwortete der Figurenhandler, weit ich sammt dem Brete mit den Gyps männchen aus dem Kopfe, besser tanzen würde als Du, und auch sogleich die Probe machen werde, und flugs schwang sich der Mann aus das Seil, liesz sich seine Figuren hinaufreichen und tanzte nun, bay die versammelte Menge vor Freuden ausjauchzte. Wer bist Du? fragte staunend, Sarini? Du bist entweder Saqui oder der Teufel! Saqui Saqui! erscholl es, und Saqui tanzt nun täglich in Italien mit den Gypsfiguren auf den Kopfe.

(*Der deutsche Hausfreund: Wochenschrift für Belehrung und Unterhaltung*. Augsburg. 1843, 287)

Sarini, indisputably one of the most skilled acrobats, appeared the other day in Trevino's market square.⁹⁵ A seller of plaster of Paris figures who happened to be passing, stopped, and looked up at him. He had his stuff on his head; a board, on which were displayed Napoleon, a Cupid, a Venus, some figures by Messerschmidt, and a nodding gnome [?]. When he was noticed by those present, the figure dealer wanted to leave; But Sarini shouted down from the tightrope: "Beat him if he does not pay; he's followed me for eight days, stares at me and sneaks away if he has to pay." "Because you're a bungler," replied the figure seller "because I, together with the board with the plaster figures on my head, can dance better than you, and I will immediately take the test," and forthwith the man swung up to the tightrope along with his figures and danced well. At that the assembled crowd shouted for joy. "Who are you?" Sarini asked in amazement. "You are either Saqui or the devil!"⁹⁶ "Saqui, Saqui!" came the answer, and now Saqui dances every day in Italy with plaster figures on her head. [My translation]

[Key words: plaster of Paris; figures; Napoleon; cupid; Venus; Messerschmidt; humour]

Pedro: 1845

Poor Pedro! what a strange load he bears! He has become one mass of images from top to toe. Well may he cry "images", in hopes that some one will ease him of his burden. They are very cheap. There is the head of Shakespeare, and of our gracious Queen; Tam o'Shanter and Souter Johnnie; Napoleon, parrots and I know not what besides, all made out of plaster of Paris, by poor Pedro in his little attic, which serves him for bed-chamber, sitting room and workshop. Have you ever seen these poor

⁹⁵ Treviño, northern Spain.

⁹⁶ Madame Saqui (1786-1866) was a well-known acrobat and tightrope walker.

Italians at their work? I have, and very poorly are they lodged and fed, I can assure you. One would wonder what can make them leave their sunny Italy, where fruits hang thick as leaves upon the tress, to come and toil in darkness and dirt in our narrowest streets. But I suppose they little know what London is till they are settled down with very distant prospect of return. They hear of it as famous city, paved with gold - that is the old story, you know - where every one can make his fortune; and they come to try. Poor Pedro, he had a happy home once, too; but a terrible earthquake shook that part of Naples which contained his little hut. The earth shook so violently that houses and walls tottered and fell, nay, in many parts whole streets not only fell but were swallowed up by the gaping earth, which opens at these times just like a hungry mouth, and closes again over all that falls in.

It was in the night this earthquake came; and Pedro, than a little boy, was roused by the cries of his father and mother, who felt their house shaking round them. Out into the open air they all rushed, with nothing but a few clothes they had on. The streets were full of people, who knelt and prayed aloud to God to spare their lives. The bells in all the churches clashed wildly, as the towers rocked to and fro. It was a dreadful day, and Pedro will never forget it. By morning many of the houses were buried in the earth, and others lay in heaps of ruin on the ground. Amongst these was the poor hut of Pedro's father. It has been a shabby little home, but still it was their home and held all their worldly goods, and sorely they wept over its destruction. The little garden, too, was all laid waste. Some kind people gave money to build up once more the ruined houses; but, whilst this was being done, there was sore want and famine, and many left their native place to try their fortunes elsewhere. And so it was that Pedro came, with many more, to earn his living by selling images in London streets.

(London Cries Illustrated for the Young, Anon 1845)

[Key words: Shakespeare; Queen Victoria; Tam O'Shanter and Souter Johnnie; Napoleon; parrots; plaster of Paris; Italians]

A strange assembly: 1845

A strange assembly of images was that! Heathen gods seemed to fraternize with angels, Madonnas, and Christian saints; Napoleon and Wellington stood motionless side by side; George the Fourth and Greenacre occupied the same shelf; William Pitt and Cobbett appeared to be contemplating each other with silent admiration; Thomas Paine elbowed a bishop; Lord Castlereagh seemed to be extending his hand to welcome Jack Ketch; Cupid pointed his arrow at the bosom of a pope.⁹⁷

(Reynolds 1845, 173)

[Key words: gods; angels; Madonna; saints; Wellington; George IV; Greenacre; Pitt; Cobbett; Paine; Castlereagh; Jack Ketch; cupid; pope]

Admiration: 1845

I saw an Italian image boy so rooted in admiration before a Madonna of Raphael's that he never seemed to perceive that there was a human being near him. I touched his shoulder at last, and asked what he admired so

⁹⁷ James Greenacre (1785-1837): The "Edgware Road Murderer", hanged for the murder of his fiancée in 1837; William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806): politician, Prime Minister; William Cobbett (1763-1835): parliamentary reformer; Thomas Paine (1737-1809): politician, philosopher, revolutionary and opponent of organised religion; Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh (1769-1822): statesman; Jack Ketch (d 1686): executioner.

much in that picture. He started, and was some time before he collected his thoughts sufficiently to answer, when he said, he had often seen it before, that his brother, who was a painter at Florence, had copied it, and that they loved it because it was like a sister whom they had lost.

“Are you glad to see it here?”

“On no – it is ours,” said he, with a deep emphasis, and a look of revengeful anger that would have startled Buonaparte.

(*Gentleman’s Magazine* 1845, 16)

[Key words: Italian; image-boy]

Murder: 1845

More recently, it has been his duty to prosecute Carl Pappenberg, a German, for the murder of an old Italian image seller in this city. The proof was very strong: the murdered man had last been seen in Pappenberg’s company; his cloths were found wet in Pappenberg’s pack, his tools secreted in the shop where Pappenberg worked, &c. The prisoner was poor, weak, debased and friendless; yet he was ably defended, and the jury found him Not Guilty. It would have been impossible, Mr. K. thought, to have rendered such a verdict had the penalty had been any other than that awful one which precludes all future correction of any possible error. Carl, who knew no English when the trial commenced, had picked up a little during its continuance, and at first understood that he had been found Guilty, and he received with his usual stolid indifference. Being appraised of his mistake soon after, he turned to a friend at hand and simply asked, ‘*How, when one man muther another, Jury say Not Guilty?*’—He was remanded to prison, as a dangerous man, on a demand of bail for his good behaviour, which was of course unable to give. Soon after, Mr. K. called on him and found him involved in the new puzzle—‘*How when Jury say they Not Guilty, still keep man in prison?*’—Mr. K. answered as well he could. He has since been shipped off to Germany – a way of getting rid of criminals which we condemn in Europe and ought not to practice ourselves.

(*New York Daily Tribune*, November 13th 1845)

[Key words: crime; murder; German; humour; Italian; image seller]

Unfortunate boys: 1845

Through the broken shutters of several windows came the sounds of horrible revelry - ribald and revolting; and from others issued cries, shrieks, oaths and the sounds of heavy blows - a sad evidence of brutality of drunken quarrels. Numerous Irish families are crowded together in the small back rooms of the houses on Saffron Hill; and the husbands and fathers gorge themselves, at the expense of broken-hearted wives and famishing children, with the horrible compound of spirit and vitriol, sold at the low gin-shops in the neighbourhood. Hosts of Italian masters also congregate in that locality; and the screams of the unfortunate boys, who writhe beneath the lash of their furious employers on their return some after an unsuccessful day with their organs, monkies, white mice, or chalk images, mingle with the other appalling or disgusting sounds, which make night in that district truly hideous”

(Reynolds 1845, 46-47)

[Key words: Saffron Hill; Italian; boys; chalk images]

Murder: 1845**Horrible and Mysterious Murder in Philadelphia**

A German, named Andrew Freager, a manufacturer of plaster of Paris images, was discovered on Monday morning in the basement story of a frame house back of Coates-st, in Philadelphia, lying in bed with his head horribly gashed with a hatchet or some other sharp instrument, and his skull broken in several places...

(*American Republican and Baltimore Daily Clipper*, January 22nd 1845)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; murder]

Le Marchand de figures: 1845

Marchand de figures, nous vendons l'Apollon de Belvédère, les lapins pour les petits enfants et le grand Napoléon, l'Hercoule-Farnèse et des fruits en panier ; achetez pour les petits enfants des perroquets tout verts qui chantent comme des rossignols.

(Anon 1845)

The Image-Seller.

Image-seller, we sell the Apollo of Belvedere, rabbits for little children and the great Napoleon, the Farnese Hercules and fruit baskets; buy green parrots that sing like nightingales for small children. [My translation]

[Key words: image seller; Apollo Belvedere; rabbits; Napoleon; Farnese Hercules; fruit baskets; parrots]

"Fancy" medallions and the vice society: 1845

A luckless Italian Image seller, who was in the habit of taking his stand on Saturday evening in the classic region of Smithfield, was charged before Alderman Hunter, at Guildhall, on Monday, with the sale of plaster medallions of an indecent character. For the general public, it appears that the Italian had got a stock of casts of a purely classical character, such as naked Venuses, Cupids with wings but without clothes, strapping Apollos, and similar copies of the antique; but, besides these casts intended for the *profanum vulgus*, he carried with him a private stock of plaster medallions to suit tastes of a more *recherché* order. This, the choicest part of his collection, was hidden in a box, and only exhibited to such customers whose fancies led them to enquire for novelties of a peculiar character. Unfortunately for him the Vice Society's agents are abroad, and ever prowling about for something vicious to pounce upon and expose. Having got scent of the Italian's dealings, they set a trap to catching in the indecent fact. One of the emissaries contrived to lull the suspicion of the Italian by asking to see some "fancy medallions," Some were accordingly shown him from the Italian's private store of so loose and libidinous a description that the Vice Society's man, in a fit of virtuous disgust, seized his whole stock and gave him in charge to the police.

The question for Sir Claudius to decide was, first, whether the fancy medallions were indecent, of which there was no doubt in the world, and secondly, whether the Italian had *wilfully* exposed them. On this point at least some argument might be raised. The prisoner's defence was that he did not bring them out for sale, but to execute an order for the medallions

given to him by *gentlemen*. This must be deemed a very transparent excuse, seeing that though “gentlemen,” there is no doubt, often purchase such things, they do not go to Smithfield for them. Yet the Italian’s plea might so far be held good, that he did not intend to exhibit such things until asked for them, and certainly there was no pretence for asserting that he *offered* them for sale. There is, moreover some, something in this sneaking way of entrapping the dealer in prohibited and profligate medallions or prints, that is calculated to excite contempt. It is, as we view it, especially hateful to see men entrapped into an offence against the laws. The immorality of this practice is hardly better than the other kind of immorality it seeks to suppress. The Italian got a month’s imprisonment for being so cunningly caught by the myrmidons of the Vice Society—first enquiring of the magistrate that he could not have a fine *instead* of going to prison. Not being a gentleman, however, we need not say that no option was allowed him, and he has at once committed to durance vile.⁹⁸

(*The Satirist or Censor of the Times*, December 21st 1845)

[Key words: Italian; image seller; Smithfield; casts; Venus; Cupid; Apollo; plaster; medallions; indecency; humour]

The Secret Rites of Ceres: 1847

THE SECRET RITES OF CERES.⁹⁹—Mary Ann Collins, a person of singularly repulsive exterior, not much relieved by a profuse display of a dishevelled and carrotty *cobra*, was charged with the illegal appropriation of a chimney ornament, representing Arcana collecting the cobs.¹⁰⁰ The prosecutrix, a Mrs. O’Brien, negated the assertion of “poor Mary Ann” as to having *lifted* the goddess of provender for the purpose of employing the image as a weapon of defence, against “a man wot wor a taking on liberties with her,” and to the ke varter sessions the old maid had in ke vourse without alternative to *adjourn*.¹⁰¹

(*Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Review* November 13th 1847)

Committal.—On Friday morning a female named Mary Ann Collins helped herself to a **chimney ornament**, value about two shillings, from the shop of Mrs. O’Brien, residing on Church-hill. Mrs. O’Brien observed the theft, and gave the thief into the custody of Constable Nowland, who found the property on the person of the accused. Collins was on Saturday committed to take her trial for the *offence*.

(*The Sydney Morning Herald* November 8th, 1847)

[Key words: chimney ornament; Ceres; value]

A revolutionist: 1848

The *Presse* has the following from Trent, in the Tyrol: —“As a dealer in images was hawking his wares about the streets a short time ago, an Austrian officer approached him, and perceiving a statue of the Pope crowned with a wreath, angrily asked if he could not expose other statues than those of that man. ‘A man,’ cried the image-seller with great *naiveté*, ‘he is not a man—he is the immortal pope—our father—the friend and

⁹⁸ “Durance vile” = lengthy prison sentence.

⁹⁹ Ceres was goddess of agriculture

¹⁰⁰ “Cobra” = Slang for long hair, perhaps originating with the snakes in the Medusa’s hair, or describing hair projecting either side of the head; “collection of cobs” = presumably Ceres harvesting wheat sheaves.

¹⁰¹ “Ke varter” = wordplay on “quarter”; “ke vourse” = “course,” both mimicking the woman’s accent.

protector of Italy!’ “Scoundrel,’ ejaculated the Austrian officer in a fury, ‘he is a revolutionist, and this is what he merits!’¹⁰² As he spoke he drew his sword, and swept off the head of the statue. A crowd assembled, and, taking the part of the image-dealer, laid violent hands on the Austrian officer. He would no doubt have been torn to pieces, had not a patrol come up and rescued him. By superior order he has since, it is said, been placed in arrest.”

(*The Standard*, January 3rd 1848)
[Key words: images; Pope]

Marlborough Street – the Italian image-seller nuisance: 1848

Jean Domingo and Augustini Chinquini, two Italian image-sellers, were brought before Mr Hardwick charged with having obstructed the public streets and annoyed the public by the mode in which they carried on their business of selling medals and images.

From the statements of the police it appeared that many complaints have been made by tradesmen at the west-end of the town, principally in Regent-street and Oxford-street, of the nuisance occasioned by the importunity and insolence of a number of sturdy Italian image sellers, towards ladies and gentlemen, in the public streets, and the obstruction they occasioned by pitching their image-cases in public thoroughfares.

(*The Standard*, June 27th 1848)
[Key words: Italian; image sellers; medals; images; selling; crime]

A strange throng: 1848

Looking out into the streets [of Vera Cruz, Mexico], a strange throng meets the eye... There is another class going about with baskets of cakes, pies, fruit and plaster images upon their heads, crying them for sale...

(*Weekly National Intelligencer*, March 4th 1848) (Washington DC)

[Key words: Mexico; plaster images]

A load of grace and worth and beauty: 1848

Punch’s Police 1848

QUEEN SQUARE.— A gaunt, oldish-looking boy, who, turning up his nose at the magistrate, gave his name as HENRY BROUGHAM, was charged with having attempted to injure Pio Nono, present Pope of Rome, by squirting at his holiness a quality of gutter-mud.¹⁰³

It appeared that some evenings ago an Italian was going down Parliament Street, carrying upon his head a collection of plaster-casts, modern and antique. The Italian belonged to that humble but useful class of the cognoscenti who have done so much to abolish the spotted cats and painted parrots from the shelves of country parlours and cottages; placing in their stead the forms and faces of beauty and genius. The Italian was one of the serviceable wayfarers, compliments by MR WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:—

¹⁰² The Austrian Empire was beset by a number of nationalistic revolutions in 1848, in which Lombards and Venetians took part.

¹⁰³ Henry Brougham (1778-1868) British statesman. The Brougham carriage was named after him. Was involved in the “Catholic question” in the 1820s.

“Or thro’ our hamlets thou wilt bear
 The sightless Milton, with his hair
 Around his placid temples curl’s;
 And SHAKESPEARE at his side—a freight
 If clay could think and mind were weight,
 For him who bore the world.”

Well, this harmless Italian paused to rest his load in Parliament Street—his load of grace, and worth and beauty. There was BAILEY’S *Eve*, with FIELD-MARSHAL PRINCE ALBERT, and, among other notables, the bust of PIUS THE NINTH.¹⁰⁴ The complainant deposed that, a friend with a barrel-organ coming up, they began to talk about the glorious regeneration of Italy, when the defendant passed them.

“Regeneration! Humbug!” said the defendant, making a mouth, and going on...

(Punch 1848)

[Key words: Italian; plaster; casts; cats; parrots; Eve; Prince Albert; Pius IX; politics; satire]

Ugly old men: 1849

One evening, Mrs Rasper, entered my room, *sans ceremonie*, and drawing her tall spare figure up to its utmost altitude, with a tragic-comic smile, ironically exclaimed, “Well sir, I was in your room while when you was out”—(supposing that it must’ve been for the purpose of dusting; I tendered her my thanks. “Dust the room, me dust the room, Sir, no; I came to look after my furniture, and see how it was treated. I was astonished— yes, Sir, I won’t allow it, never did, and what’s more, I won’t have it, Sir! Being perfectly innocent of having, at least to my knowledge, given any offence, I reiterated, “won’t allow it,” “won’t have it.” “Pray, what is it you will neither allow nor have, Mrs Rasper?” Looking towards the sideboard (which in my opinion, I had decorated with a couple of handsome busts), she snappishly replied, “Why, Sir, the top of my sideboard made into a common image-board; I won’t have them two ugly old men’s heads (ye gods! Shakspeare and Milton); If I had let the room to a common foreign vagabond of an Italian image-boy, it could not have been worse off— it breaks my heart, it does, Sir. It shan’t be, Sir! my best mahogany sideboard shan’t be disgraced.”

(Dalton 1849, 217)

[Key words: busts; image-board; Shakespeare; Milton; Italian; image-boy; taste; humour]

Italian Image Boys and Protestantism: 1849

LETTER TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD DERBY, &c.¹⁰⁵

My Lord, – knowing how anxious your lordship is for the purity of the Protestant religion, as established in this country, I beg, as a subject of her beloved Majesty the Queen, to call your attention to the notorious fact of certain vagabond Italians, evidently sent by his Holiness for the conversion of this country to the Roman Catholic Religion, and who are known as the “Italian Image Boys.” As long as the said foreigners offered for sale the plaster busts of Shakspeare, the Duke of Wellington, and such

¹⁰⁴ “Bailey’s Eve”: *Eve at the Fountain* (1822) or *Eve Listening to Adam* (1842); statues by Edward Hodges Baily.

¹⁰⁵ Lord Derby, Edward Smith-Stanley (1799-1869) was leader of the Tory party and its “protectionist” wing.

innocent subjects, they did not act in any way contrary to the spirit of the act, passed in the 10th year of the reign of his late Majesty King George IV.; but when we, Protestants, see the kind permission of the liberal laws of this country so abused, as the attempt to sell such a Papistical images as the Crucifix, Madonnas, Angel Guardians, &c., which continually meet our eye in the public streets of her Majesty's highway, we cannot but feel disgusting and scandalised. And, my lord, of what use are such "objects and symbols" of worship, as you beautifully express similar things in your Lordship's proclamation?¹⁰⁶ Have we not small and large "Greek Slaves," "Dancing Nymphs," dressed in every way to suit the hot season of the year?¹⁰⁷

[...]

...it has been represented to us that some subjects of the Holy See, And called Italian image boys, have a exercise the rights of our British subjects in the highways and places the public resort, And has frequently been and ceremonial dresses, Born on their heads, object or symbols of what are Catholic subjects cherish and love in their religion– Namely, images of Angel guardians, Madonnas and crucifixes in plaster to the great scandal and annoyance of large numbers of people, and to the manifest danger of being broken; and, whereas, it has been represented to us that such images have been carried under the windows in the sight, and to the annoyance of a certain portion of our female subjects have reached a certain age and are called 'old maids;' and to the scandal of those, our beloved subjects, who frequent at a sacred place called Exeter Hall.¹⁰⁸ We have, therefore, thought it our bounden duty, by and with the advice of our Privy Council, to issue this, our Royal Proclamation, solemnly warning all those whom it may concern, that whilst we are resolved to permit the said Italian image boys to offer for sale modest 'Greek Slaves' and 'Venuses,' and to protect our loving subjects in the undisturbed enjoyment of the purchase of the same, we are determined to prevent and repressed such offences as the sale of the aforesaid objects or symbols of worship...

(*Public Ledger* 1849)

[Key words: humour; Shakespeare; Wellington; crucifix; Madonna; guardian angel; Greek Slave; dancing nymph;]

Public taste: 1849

"Not that the public taste improved with [the disappearance of lead figure makers in 1787]. One absurdity only gave place to another. As late as the year 1826 or 1827, painted cats and parrots, and plaster casts of the most inferior description, were hawked about the town, and met with an extensive sale. Within the last few years, however, public taste has improved considerably. All these have disappeared, and busts of poets, painters, musicians, and illustrious men, very beautifully executed, are alone seen on the boards of the Italian dealers, with copies of some of the finest models of the antique.

(Smith 1849, 12-13)

[Key words: cats; parrots; poets; painters; musicians; celebrities; boards; Italian; classical]

¹⁰⁶ "Your Lordship's proclamation" – Lord Derby was seen as sympathetic to the Catholic church

¹⁰⁷ "Dancing Nymphs" = a sculpture by Canova; "Greek Slave" = a notorious sculpture by Powers.

¹⁰⁸ Exeter Hall, on London's Strand, was often used for political gatherings, especially by those against slavery and the corn laws.

Marchands de figures de plâtre: 1850

Vous avez souvent rencontré suivant les trottoirs, côtoyant les quais ou arrêté aux coins des carrefours avec sa planche qu'entoure une corde en guise de balustrade. Là se dressent les bustes et les statuettes des grands hommes, les consoles cariatides destinées à l'ornement des modestes appartements, les figurines de fantaisie que recommande la mode. Le mouleur de plâtre est à la sculpture ce que l'orgue de Barbarie est à la musique.

Il adopte l'œuvre en vogue, il la popularise ; il constate à la fois et propage les succès. Sa planche est comme un musée portatif qui s'adresse aux préférences du passant, qui sollicite sa passion et l'excite à dénouer les cordons d'une bourse que la prudence tend toujours refermer.

L'examen de ces expositions en plein air donne une idée assez exacte, sinon de l'opinion publique, au moins des préoccupations de la foule. On peut y suivre les oscillations du goût et les variations de la popularité.

Dans notre enfance, nous nous le rappelons encore, ces planches étaient couvertes de princes et de maréchaux qui encadraient les bustes de Paul et de Virginie, les chiens à têtes mouvantes et les lapins blancs ; plus tard, nous y avons vu Bolivar, le général Foy, Voltaire et Rousseau ; puis les figures gothiques remises en faveur par l'étude du moyen âge ; plus tard encore, ce furent les têtes de Goethe, de Schiller, de Byron, faisant pendant à la Jeanne d'Arc ou aux pastiches en style Pompadour.

J'en passe, et des meilleurs.

Chacun de nos lecteurs peut lui-même compléter la liste en recherchant dans ses souvenirs. La plupart des célébrités littéraires et politiques, des fantaisies de l'art, des résurrections historiques, ont paru là, à leur tour, comme sur un piédestal, pour en descendre bientôt et disparaître. Les anciens élevaient des statues d'airain que la guerre et les révolutions renversaient bien vite ; plus sages, du moins en cela, nous nous contentons de mouler sur le plâtre nos admirations ou nos caprices du moment, comme si nous voulions symboliser, par la fragilité de la matière, la fragilité de ce qu'elle représente.

Hélas ! combien de ces réputations n'ont pu même avoir la durée du plâtre qui les célébrait ! Que de grands hommes disparus avant leurs bustes ; que de compositions devenues vieilles avant d'avoir été jaunies par le temps ! Le mouleur ambulant est un terrible juge ; il constate pour ainsi dire l'arrêt du siècle. La vogue passée, il brise impitoyablement le moule, et l'œuvre ou l'homme, illustre quelques jours auparavant, rentre aussitôt dans le néant.

Considéré sous un autre point de vue, le marchand de figures a une véritable importance dans notre civilisation moderne ; il répand l'art, il fait l'éducation des yeux, il élève insensiblement le goût populaire. Quand on compare les plâtres qui couvrent aujourd'hui les éventaires ambulants à ceux qu'on y voyait il y a trente ans, on est frappé des progrès du style et de la forme. Évidemment l'intervalle qui séparait l'art populaire de l'art choisi, tend chaque jour à s'amoinrir ; les plus grossières épreuves vendues pour quelques centimes ont un vague reflet des grandes œuvres qu'elles copient ; on sent la main plus habile, l'œil mieux exercé, l'ouvrier qui comprend l'artiste, s'il ne l'est point encore lui-même.

Cette élévation croissante dans les productions d'ordre inférieur est un symptôme important ; elle prouve que les arts plastiques entrent de plus en plus dans les habitudes, qu'ils se font domestiques ; qu'après avoir

été le privilège des nobles et riches demeures, ils tendent à devenir l'embellissement des plus humbles existences. C'est là plus qu'un progrès, c'est une véritable révolution qui révèle un mouvement d'ascension marquée dans l'éducation intellectuelle du plus grand nombre.

(Charton 1850, 588-9)

Sellers of plaster figures

You have often met him along the sidewalks, beside the quays or at street corners with his board and its rope handrail. On it stand the busts and statuettes of great men, familiar caryatids destined to ornament modest apartments, figurines of fantasy that follow fashion. Plaster casts are to sculpture as barrel organs are to music.

He adopts whatever is in vogue, and popularises it; it catches on and spreads. His board is like a portable museum that caters to passing preferences, inviting interest and cheerfully loosening the cords of scholarship that prudence always tends to keep tied.

Examination of these outdoor exhibitions gives a fairly accurate idea, if not of the public, at least of the preoccupations of the masses. One can follow the oscillations of taste and changes in popularity.

In our childhood, we remember, these boards were covered with princes and marshals as well as busts of Paul and the Virgin, dogs with nodding heads and white rabbits; later, we saw Bolivar, General Foy, Voltaire and Rousseau; then gothic figures returned for the study of the Middle Ages; later still, there were the heads of Goethe, Schiller, Byron, a representation of Joan of Arc or a pastiche of la Pompadour.

And so on and so on.

Each of our readers may themselves add to the list by searching their memories. Most literary and political celebrities, fantasies of art, historical resurrections appeared there, in turn, as on a pedestal, soon to descend and disappear. Once, bronze statues were quickly overturned by war and revolutions; now wiser, at least in this, we simply cast our admiration or our whims of the moment in plaster, as if we wanted to symbolise the fragility of the material and the fragility of what it represents.

Alas! How many of these reputations even outlasted plaster! Those great men who disappeared before their busts; that become out of date before being yellowed by time! The traveling moulder is a strict judge; what he decides can stop a century. He ruthlessly breaks the mould of anyone who is no longer in vogue, and the work of humans, which could be seen just days earlier, returns to nothingness.

Considered from another point of view, the image-seller has a real importance in our modern civilisation; he spreads art, the education of the eyes, and he unknowingly improves popular taste. When comparing the plaster on the street stalls of today to those we saw thirty years ago, one is struck by the progress of style and form. Obviously the gap between popular art and the original tends to diminish each day; the coarsest that sell for pennies only vaguely reflect the great works they copy; with a more skilful hand and a better trained eye, the worker becomes the artist, if he isn't one already.

This growing rise in enthusiasm amongst the lower orders is an important sign; it proves that the visual arts are spreading increasingly into ordinary life; after having been the privilege of the noble and wealthy homes, they are now embellishing the humblest existences. This is where

there is more than progress, there is a real revolution which is revealing a marked upward movement in the intellectual education of the majority.

[Translation: the author]

[Key words: busts; statuettes; princes; marshals; Paul; Virgin; nodding dogs; rabbits; Bolivar; Foy; Voltaire; Rousseau; Goethe; Schiller; Byron; Joan of Arc; la Pompadour; image seller; art; education; cost]

Buy a bust of General Taylor? 1850

The itinerant seller of plaster casts is a regular street figure in all our great cities. By means of a few worn-out moulds which he has brought from Italy, the poor man makes a stock of casts, and mounting them on a board, cries them about the streets. He's not at all particular about prices. If he gets a piece of silver for his piece of plaster, his object seems to be gained; so that if you really do not wish to purchase, it is rather dangerous to offer him a quarter of a dollar for the cast which he wishes you to buy at two dollars.

When he has followed this street traffic for a few years, he has amassed money enough to begin business on a larger scale; and accordingly he hires a shop, and commences the making and selling of all sorts of plaster casts. He will model your bust, giving a very formidable likeness; or cast you a leaden Venus and Apollo to place on pedestals in your garden; or copy a pair of Canova's Nymphs to place in your hall. Instead of carrying a small shop on his head through the streets, he now sends forth a little army of his compatriots, poor expatriated Romans or Tuscans, regretting the glorious skies of Italy, while they are selling busts of the glorious heroes of America. When our seller of casts has made his fortune, he will go home and purchase a villa on the delightful shores of Lake Como; and tell his descendants what a wretched country is America.

(Croome 1850, 33-34)

[Key words: plaster; casts; Italy; Venus; Apollo; Canova; nymphs; heroes; America]

A great store of shepherdesses: 1851

[in a "swag shop"] a great store of shepherdesses, of greyhounds of a gamboge colour, of what I heard called "figures" (allegorical nymphs with and without birds or wreaths in their hands), very tall looking Shakspeares (I did not see one of these windows without its Shakspeare, a sitting figure) and some "pots" which seem to be either shepherds or musicians; from what I could learn, at the pleasure of the seller, the buyer or the inquirer.¹⁰⁹ The Shepherd or musician is usually seated under a tree; he wears a light blue coat, and yellow breeches, and his limbs, more than his body, are remarkable for their bulk; call the merely fact does not sufficiently express their character, and in some pots, they are as short and stubby as they are bulky. On my asking if the dogs were intended for Italian greyhounds, I was told, no, they are German. I alluded however to the species of the animal represented; my informant to the place of manufacture, for the pots were chiefly German.

(Mayhew 1851, 333-4)

¹⁰⁹ "Gamboge" = a deep brown colour.

[Key words: shepherdesses; greyhounds; nymphs; Shakespeare; musicians; German]

The Sense of the Beautiful: 1852

“Images! Images!”

The sound falls on the ear with a foreign accent, and there in the street, stands the poor Italian boy, with his tray balanced on his head waiting for a purchaser for his pretty wares. There are beautifully shaped vases, urns of classic mould, and various figures, among which the favorite Fisher-boy, and Samuel are conspicuous.¹¹⁰

“Images! Images!”

They gleam pure and white in the clear sunlight. They are radiant with beauty, though of frail and common material. Hither comes a young man who has a new home to make cheerful and beautiful. He bears off that exquisitely shaped vase, whose graceful lines shall convey an impression of beauty to many a half-conscious observer.

Yonder mechanic has taken in his hard and toil-worn hand that delicate image, the kneeling Samuel. His clear eye looks with pleasure on that innocent upturned countenance. He carries it home to be a joy and a pleasure to his wife, and to shed a refining influence over his simple abode. The father has brought his little boy hither and the child full of eager delight is bearing off the Friendship, a boy and dog, while his little tongue chatters rapidly in praise of his prize. One after another the statues are borne away, till there are only two or three large and a few very small ones left.

“Images! Images!”

And the boy goes off down the street to seek purchasers for the remainder. These images,— these pure, beautiful forms, they adorn how many houses into which the costlier marble may never come! And for nearly all the pleasure the eye may derive from them they are as valuable as that less fragile material.

We always look with pleasure on those trays of images thus borne through the streets. Almost all the statues are after the designs of great Sculptors, and many of the vases are of the Etruscan models. We are always glad to see those lovely figures going into houses where there are children. A few years ago, cheap, coarse, red and yellow vases of fruit, or demi-figures in plaster of showy colors, or daubs of pictures of men in red coats and sky-blue pantaloons, of women in scarlet gowns, purple shawls, and green bonnets, of children robed in every color of the rainbow, and military men in coats like Joseph’s ‘of many colors,’ —these were the attractions laid before the uneducated and unrefined tastes of the community. Now these pure, white images, these refined and graceful forms will gradually lift them up to a more exquisite appreciation of the truly beautiful.

Take two children of poor parents, with minds as nearly equal as may be, give them food and clothing alike, but place in the bed-chamber of one some one of these beautiful statues, the Samuel, or the Guardian Angel, or some other equally lovely; hang on his wall one or two good engravings, a landscape, or some pure, sweet, benignant face, (and the cost of these may be very trifling,)—let him in addition cultivate a little bed of flowers, and give him, besides his Bible, those dear classics of childhood,

¹¹⁰ “The Fisher Boy” — probably representations of the *Neapolitan Fisherboy* by Francois Rude (1831).

Pilgrim's Progress, Paul and Virginia, Robinson Crusoe, and a few others equally precious,—and let the other have none of these advantages, but be left to seek his pleasure in the streets, or among rude companions, and you have two boys, whose paths in life, starting from the same point, will, probably, diverge forever.

The first will have in his mind thoughts and shapes of loveliness and innocence, called up and fostered unconsciously to himself, till they have become a part of his existence. His imagination will have learned early to take a wide range, and he will form to himself scenes and notions that will elevate his being. The coarser pleasures of life, cannot relish to him, for his refinement will reject them, and rude manners will disgust that sense of propriety given by a love of the beautiful; if his life be active he will gather new treasures of beauty from the scenes and characters about him, and if sickness lays its heavy hand on him, and he is long an invalid, he can people his sick chamber with lovely forms,— angel-shapes that shall sweetly smile on him. A fresh and fragrant flower will gladden him for days; the blending harmony of colors will spread enchantment around him, and make him forget his pain, and his vivid imagination will seek to shadow out the future world, which is all of glorious beauty.

If the boy whose sense of the beautiful is uncultivated and smothered out, —if he escape being contaminated with evil habits, coarse manners, rude and profane language—yet his perceptions of grace and loveliness will be dim, the sweetest and most wonderful flower will be scarcely more to him than a weed, not nearly so much as an onion or a turnip; the loftiest tree that spreads out its mighty boughs and waves its shadowing foliage, will be cut down without the slightest touch of feeling lest it should shade his potato patch. He will look with indifference on the changing beauty of the wandering clouds, and never having learned to love refinement and beauty, will of course undervalue, if not despise the love of it in others. All the myriad pleasures and delights of taste will be utterly lost to him, and the coarse jest and rude mirth will be his preferred enjoyments. C. F. O.

(*Cambridge Chronicle*, May 22nd 1852)(Massachusetts)

[Key words: images; Italian; tray; vases; urns; Fisher-boy; Samuel]

Resplendent colours: 1852

The gray mist of evening, rising slowly from the river, enveloped her as she disappeared up the bank, and the swollen current and floundering masses of ice presented a hopeless barrier between her and her pursuer. Haley therefore slowly and discontentedly returned to the little tavern, to ponder further what was to be done. The woman opened to him the door of a little parlor, covered with a rag carpet, where stood a table with a very shining black oil-cloth, sundry lank, high-backed wood chairs, with some plaster images in resplendent colors on the mantel-shelf, above a very dimly-smoking grate; a long hard-wood settle extended its uneasy length by the chimney, and here Haley sat him down to meditate on the instability of human hopes and happiness in general.

(Stowe 1852, 97)

[Key words: plaster; images; colours]

Wellington's nose: 1852

THE IMAGE MAN

Alas! Alas! Poor Image Boy, what a crash is here!
 You've trod upon some orange peel, and slipped, I sadly fear,
 Or else your board you've balanced wrong, or 'gainst a post have
 hit,
 But whatsoever is the cause, it matters not a bit.
 Now, little boy and little girl, if you have pence to spare,
 Pray give them to the image boy, his losses to repair.
 There goes the Duke of Wellington, with only half a nose,
 And there's Prince Albert on his head, instead of on his toes.
 Poor boy! Let's hope each passer by will pity his misshap,
 And drop a halfpenny or more, into his furry cap.

(Anon 1852)

[Key words: image; boy; destruction; Wellington; Albert; humour]

White cats: 1853

The British ballad-singer has been destroyed—literally ground out of his livelihood—by the Italian organ-boy; and the old British image-seller, who was accustomed—at the due season—to appear in our streets with plaster-cats upon his head—white cats spotted with black wafer—he has also been destroyed by the Italian image man—

Who through our hamlet still will bear
 The sightless Milton, with his hair
 Around his placid temples curl'd;
 And Shakspeare at his side. Fit freight,
 If clay could think, and mind were weight,
 For him who bore the world!

(*Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, October 10th 1853)

[Key words: British; image-seller; plaster; cats; Italian; image-man; Wordsworth]

Embellishment: 1853

Thenceforward we were indefatigable in our efforts at embellishment. I gave a dollar a piece to an Italian image man for two casts of the Huguenot and Catholic soldier, and when placed on the mantelpiece they had a very fine effect. But they were entirely eclipsed when Leo (our third roommate) made his appearance one day with a great plaster group of the Nymph and Satyr, which having three figures, (including the child) and looking so exceedingly expensive altogether, I could not repress a sigh as I regarded my two soldiers, and no one would guess at a higher price than I gave for them.¹¹¹

(*New York Times*, March 5th 1853)

[Key words: Italian; casts; image man; Huguenot; Catholic soldier; nymph and satyr; humour]

A fortunate vendor: 1853

The Queen proceeded to the castle through the private grounds on the north side of the park, the entrance to which opens immediately upon the South-Western station. On her Majesty's return, about two hours afterwards, some persons had congregated to witness her departure, and among them

¹¹¹ "Nymph and Satyr" – this refers to the group including a baby Bacchus, or sculptures of Mars, Venus and Amour.

was a poor Italian boy, with his rude frame of images upon his head. The fine expressive countenance of the lad was observed by the quick and scrutinizing eye of the Queen who herself beckoned the youth to follow, which he did to the vestibule attached to the elegant suites of apartments provided for her Majesty at the station. The boy, conscious that it was the Queen who had summoned him, hurried to the porch of a state of bewilderment, with his images upon his head, when one of the officers present seeing his confused state, assisted in bringing him and his board to the feet of the sovereign. The Queen gazed for a moment on the youth, and then selected from his little stock, "The Infant Samuel Praying," a "Venus," and a "Lady at the Bath." After liberally rewarding the little fortunate vendor, the Queen had her purchases placed in the train, in which her Majesty, in a few minutes afterwards, took her departure"

(*Morning Post*, 21st July 1853)

[Key words: Queen Victoria; Italian; boy; images; Samuel; Venus; Lady at the Bath]

A scene in a barrack-Room: 1853

The mantelpiece (and indeed the whole room) bears undeniable evidence of a recent debauch, or 'flare up.' On it are strewn the fragments of broken vases, and plaster of Paris images...but there, and amidst the mighty wreck, and opposite to a bust of the Duke of Wellington, sits my friend Snooks, with all the stoicism of a philosopher, puffing his meerschaum tranquilly.

(*The Public Ledger*, November 25th 1853)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; Wellington]

Classical: 1854

His bar, instead of being covered with a decent piles of halfpence and trays full of silver, that a right minded publican loves to accumulate towards Saturday, was tricked out with all sorts of bulbs and roots, and trumpery—nasturtiums, heliotropes, ranunculuses, and the like; and there wasn't an Italian image-man out of Leather Lane that came in to take a drop but he'd buy a Venus, or a Jenny Lind, or a Holy Family of; and these he'd stick up on gim-crack brackets under his tubs, and ask me with a simpering grin I didn't think it classical? Classical! What business has a license victualler with the classics?

(Sala 1854, 70)

[Key words: Italian; image-man; Leather Lane; Venus Jenny Lind; Holy Family; humour]

Recollections of My Grandfather's Home: 1854

Ho, for the country farm-house, as it was twenty years ago. [...]The quaint bits of China on the mantel have made room for far more commonplace plaster images.

(*Daily National Era*, March 30th 1854)

[Key words: china; mantelpiece; plaster; images]

Cockshyes 1: 1854

You have doubtless heard of the sudden closing of the Jesuit College of St Michel, near St Etienne, “by order of the authorities.” A great deal has been made of the fact, as though there was something very serious concealed under it. The grounds of the proceeding, as related to me by an official personage interested in its investigation, were simply these. An image vender was passing by the college with his board full busts of the Emperor.¹¹² No sooner did the student see these, than they surrounded the man, took from him all his busts, set some of them upon a dunghill, and made what are called cockshyes of them!¹¹³ and solemnly beheaded others with a wooden sword! The perpetration of these deeds, committed no doubt with considerable clamour, was hushed up by the college authorities. But a maître d’[illegible] who had witnessed them, and was shortly after dismissed for bad conduct, avenged himself by carrying the tale to the prefect. The Government took the matter en serieux, and abruptly sent an order to close the college. The clergy have taken the act in great dudgeon. The Pere Ravignan has seen the Emperor on that subject; but I have not yet learned whether any revocation of the sentence has been obtained.¹¹⁴

(*The Morning Chronicle*, January 31st 1854)

[Key words: image vender; Napoleon]

Stop thief: 1854

A singular case of abduction – This morning a considerable amount of merriment was created opposite our office, in Fulton Street, near Front, in which a young Italian image vender was the principal actor. A man came up to him, it seems, and under pretence of making a purchase lifted the image of the Virgin Mary from the basket, and after examining it pretty closely, all at once started off. Italian appeared at a loss what to do to regain his property, and not thinking it safe to leave his basket behind to follow the thief, and being unable to overtake him with the load, he set up a most piercing and agonizing cry, tore his hair and imprecated in Italian. A large number was soon attracted thither, and many were the inquiries and anxious looks as to the cause of his distress, when the purloiner of the inanimate Virgin made his appearance, and restored it to the distracted vender, who dried up his tears and departed rejoicing, amid the laughter of the crowd.

(*The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 6th 1854)

[Key words: Italian; image vender; Virgin; humour]

Embezzling: 1855

An Italian image-boy (whose name the Court was unable to ascertain) was brought up by the police, having been given into custody for embezzling some money the property of his master; but no one appearing to prosecute he was dismissed.

(*The Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties*,
October 19th, 1855)

¹¹² Either Napoleon Bonaparte or (perhaps) Napoleon III.

¹¹³ By the nineteenth century, cock-shying, the once popular blood sport of throwing stones or sticks at a captive or half-buried cockerel, had become a memory, and the term, when used, referred to throwing objects at a target, sometimes a metal cockerel.

¹¹⁴ Pere Ravignan (1795-1858) was a Jesuit preacher who argued against the suppression of the order. “The Emperor” was presumably Napoleon III.

[Key words: Italian; image boy; master; crime]

A cure for ennui: 1855

It was a scene fit for a painter's eye. That dying dark-eyed foreigner on his lowly pallet bed; the humble room; the board of images on the floor, and the sunburnt hat and well-worn wallet hanging on a rusty nail at his head. On one side of the bed, knelt the solemn-toned, earnest, and benevolent missionary, his anxiety to teach the lad quickened by consciousness of inability to convey intelligible instruction, and his belief that the boy hung on the verge of eternity. On the other side of the Italian knelt the young votary of the world — the gay, fashionable Frank Weston, holding the poor boy's wasted hand, and a copy of the New Testament in the Italian tongue, prepared to translate the simple comments into words that the lad could understand.

(Tolliver 1855, 71-17)

[Key words: images; board; melodrama; Italian]

Napoleon's head is gone! 1856

Charge of Stealing Money. — Peter Petertoit was charged with stealing from the dwelling-house of Matthew Piesse two sovereigns, a half-sovereign, and 4s. in silver, also one chimney ornament, on the 10th inst. Mr. Please deposed that prisoner had been in his house all day on Sunday, when they had something too much to drink. Prisoner left early on Monday morning, and on witness awaking his wife said some one had been into the room and thrown her dress on the floor and rifled her pocket, taking therefrom two sovereigns; a half-sovereign, and some silver. Prisoner slept with another wan in the front room, and witness and his wife in a separate apartment at the end of the passage. The wife on getting up went to the room where prisoner had slept, and cried, out, "Oh, dear, not only my money is gone, but Napoleon's head is gone along with it"— (laughter)— alluding to the image which was found in the Rainbow public-house, where it had been left by the prisoner. Prosecutor's wife corroborated this statement; and a witness named Wheat spoke to having seen in prisoner's possession some gold and silver. Detective Badman took prisoner into custody, he denied the charge. Remanded till this day for further evidence.

(*South Australian Register* November 12th 1856)

[Key words: chimney-ornament; Napoleon; image; humour]

Come Buy My Pretty Images: 1856

Come Buy My Pretty Images

Written & Sung by

Mr. J.W. Fielder

Arranged by

J. Watkins

Also sung by

W.T.Critchfield & W. Warde

London Published by B. Williams 11 Paternoster Row

Ent. St. Hall. Price 6d

Come buy dese pretty Images, Vot to you now I show,
De old ones I have sell dem all, And dese are new you know,

Dese Images so vary sheep, to sell I now vill try,
 Vary fine, vary sheep, vary pretty vill you buy,
 Vill you but my pretty Images, dese Image vill you buy,
 Vary fine, vary sheep, Vill you buy vill you buy,
 Of a poor Italian, Vat'd sooner laugh as cry,
 Come buy my pretty Images dese Image vill you buy.

Did first is Great Victoria, de first one of dis land,
 She visited de wounded, and she take dem by de hand,
 De Soldiers cry wid joy such sights was nevare seen,
 And tears dey trickle down de cheeks of dis our lovely Queen.
 Who'll buy dis Royal Image &c.

De next is Prince Albert, to de war he nevare roam,
 He get Pay for doing noting, and he stop quite safe at home,
 Aldo he is Field Marshal he nevair take de Field
 He played babes in nursery, but not wid sword and shield.
 Who'll buy dis Brave Image &c.

Now dis is Omer Pasha, what has always show'd his might,
 A warrior so great, and victorious in de fight,
 De river near de Fortress, his troops did ford so well,
 At *In-gore* was de battle, and in gore de Russians fell.¹¹⁵
 Who'll Buy dis brave Pasha &c.

Here's de late Lord Raglan, for now he's dead and gone,
 De Army and de Navy too, his loss did deeply mourn,
 Be know no man is faultless from de Cottage to de Throne,
 So let dose who find de fault wif him, look vell after dere own.¹¹⁶
 Who'll buy dis faithful Image &c.

Now here's anoder Image what has brought himself to shame,
 Once de first Lord of de Admirals, Jemmy Graham is his name
 He dig a pit for Charles Napier and den de silly elf,
 Forget dat he had made it and he tumble in himself.¹¹⁷
 Who'll buy dis silly Image &c.

Here's Sir Charles Napier, what dey tried to disgrace,
 But He sits in Parliament and meets dem face to face,
 He sure to tell dem what he think, whatever it may be,
 And make his name perhaps as great, on land as on de sea.¹¹⁸
 Who'll buy dis Injur'd Image &c.

Now here's anoder Image_he's one very gallant man,
 His name is General Windham who fought at de Redan,
 His coolness and his Courage midst de Carnage & de strife,
 Has won a name in History, more lasting than his life.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Omar Pasha (1806-1871) was an Ottoman general who, during the Crimean War, defeated a large force of Russians at Eupatoria

¹¹⁶ FitzRoy Somerset, 1st Baron Raglan (1788-1855) commanded the British troops in the Crimea in 1854-55 and gave the order that led to the Charge of the Light Brigade. He was held responsible for the poor conditions of British forces during the Siege of Sevastopol.

¹¹⁷ Sir James Graham (1792-1861) was a conservative politician who as First Lord of the Admiralty was blamed for the lack of progress in the Baltic Campaign and resigned in 1855.

¹¹⁸ Charles Napier (1786-1860) served in the Royal Navy 1799-1854 was criticised for deciding not to attack Sveaborg and Kronstadt during the Baltic Campaign. His refusal was later justified, but he remained in dispute with the Admiralty after being elected MP for Southwark in 1855.

Who'll buy dis Redan Hero &c.

Dis is Colin Campbell who has stood de brunt of all,
From de Alma, to de very time Sebastopol did fall,
Den he return to England, but as soon go back again,
For when duty calls such men as he, it nevere calls in Vain.¹²⁰
Who'll buy dis brave Campbell &c.

Dis is Admiral Lyons he's de Lion of de main,
Dat in de Sea of Azoff destroyed de Russian grain,
Hi Tars dey all are Lions too also not so by name,
But dere Lions in dere hearts you know & dat is just de same.¹²¹
Who'll buy dis British Lion &c.

Here's de Earl of Cardigan, and Earl of Lucan too,
Da Charge at Balaclava wid de Horseman brave tho' few,
Dey pay de Russians dearly some say dey Charge in Vain,
So now dey have come back, dey want to Charge dem both
again.¹²²
Who'll buy dese dashing Horseman &c.

Now here's one lovely Image Miss Nightingale it be,
She leave her native shore and cross de stormy Sea,
She whisper consolation in de dying Soldiers ear,
And de wound dey forget dere pain whenever she is near.¹²³
Who'll buy dis Angel Image &c.

Here's de Earl of Clarendon to Paris he did go,
To hold de Conference to see, if we fight or no,
He done his duty Statesmanlike widout a show of fear,
He prove himself a better judge, dan Russell did last year.¹²⁴
Who'll buy &c.

London, Printed & Published by B. Williams,
11, Paternoster Row

Pipeclay: 1857

Pipeclay Images.—A correspondent of the *Ballaarat Star* writes
“Conceiving that every novel application of the raw productions of nature
by which we are so abundantly surrounded deserves notice and
encouragement at the hands of the press, I would beg, through the medium
of your columns, to call attention to the German boy who has recently
made his appearance in the township with a collection of busts and images,
which I understand to have been moulded from the pipeclay of Ballaarat.

¹¹⁹ Charles Ash Windham (1810-1870), the “Hero of the Redan” commanded a charge in the Battle of the Great Redan during the Siege of Sebastopol in 1855.

¹²⁰ Field Marshall Colin Campbell (1792-1863) commanded the Highland Brigade during the Battle of Alma. He returned to England when he was not given overall command in the Crimea, but returned after being given a command when the army was split into two corps.

¹²¹ Edmund Lyons (1790-1858) was commander of the Black Sea Fleet and took part in a sea battle in the Sea of Azov in 1855.

¹²² The Charge of the Light Brigade took place at Balaclava on 25th October 1854.

¹²³ Florence Nightingale (1820-1910)

¹²⁴ George Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon (1800-1870), as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, took part in the 1856 Congress of Paris to end the Crimean War. Lord John Russell (1792-1878), retired temporarily from politics in 1855 after unsuccessful Crimean War negotiations in Vienna.

The wares of the itinerant image boy formed the theme of inspiration of some of Wordsworth's most exquisite verses, which, doubtless, many of your readers will call to mind but looking purely at the utilitarian side of the question, I think we should hail the introduction of this manufacture as one of the many uses to which our native clays, earths, and rocks may be applied in the future."

(*Bendigo Advertiser*, July 14th 1857)

[Key words: Australia; busts; images; pipeclay; Wordsworth]

Immoral and indecent: 1857

THE GREEK SLAVE—The good people of Mobile seem disposed to carry their modesty a little too far. We notice in the *Advertiser* of Saturday, that two men have been arrested in that city for vending plaster of Paris images of Power's [sic] Greek slave, they being deemed immoral and indecent in their character.

(*The Daily Dispatch*, March 3rd 1857) (Richmond Va)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; Greek Slave]

The *Mobile Advertiser* says that two men have been arrested in that city for vending plaster of Paris images of Powers' Greek slave, they being deemed immoral and indecent in their character. Served them right. The Greek Slave is an "incendiary document."¹²⁵

(*Burlington Free Press*, February 27th 1857)

[Key words: censorship; plaster of Paris; images; Greek Slave]

House of many names: 1859

Lastly, there is a model, or sample piece of workmanship, of which copies are to this day sold, principally to the ladies, which I have known for nearly twenty years. It consists of a hollow cottage of latitudinarian architecture, composed of plaster of Paris, with stained glass windows, and with a practicable chimney. In the hollow part of the edifice an oil lamp is nocturnally placed; and the light pouring through the windows, and the smoke curling up the chimney (not altogether inodourously), produce a charming and picturesque effect. This building has had many names. When I knew it first, it was, I think, William Tell's Chalet. Then it was the Birthplace of the Poet Moore. Then it was Shakspeare's House. Then Her Majesty's Highland Hut or Shieling, near Balmoral, in Scotland. And now it is the Birthplace of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. House of many names! farewell!

(Sala 1859, 192)

[Key words: cottage; plaster of Paris; illumination; humour]

Buy my him-a-ges: 1859

One of the latest fashionable arrivals to be noticed in our streets is that of, if we may judge from his appearance, a real Italian "Image" man, of whom so many are to be met with in England and on the Continent. His stock of Plaster of Paris ornaments are for the most part of the old stamp—the "Sleeping Beauty," and the "Praying Boy," occupying a very conspicuous

¹²⁵ Perhaps a reference to abolitionist Hinton Rowan Helper's 1857 book *The Impending Crisis*, which was called an incendiary document by pro-slavery southerners. However the phrase was in frequent use at the time.

position on his board, which, like all the rest of his craft, he, of course, carries on his head.

(*Bendigo Advertiser*, April 5th 1859)

[Key words: Australia; Italian; image man; plaster of Paris; ornaments; Sleeping Beauty; Samuel]

A rich man: 1859

“You remember Antonio Bajocci, of Bergamo, he that put fire to the guardhouse in Brescia and had to depart very suddenly in consequence?”

Pierro gave an acquiescent nod.

“Well, Antonio fled to America, to the city of New York, where he makes plaster images—heads of Napoleon, of the grand Washington, of little Samuel, of Poll Parrot, and other things, which please that monster, the American people; and, Corpo di Dio! Antonio is well pleased with his business, which makes him a rich man.”

(*The National Era*, December 22nd 1859) (Washington DC)

[Key words: Napoleon; Washington; Samuel; Poll Parrot; plaster; images; New York]

Peashooter practice: 1859

I then went into the plaster image business, but the boys spoiled my assortment by stealing my Napoleons to throw stones at, and abstracting all my Greek Slaves to practice at with peashooters.

(*The Prairie News*, February 17th 1859)

[Key words: plaster; images; Napoleon; Greek Slave]

A poem: 1859

An image-vender knocked on my front window,
Whereat enraged, I seized a pail of water,
And dashed it on him; ‘twas a sin though,
Which I repent of, “’cause I hadn’t oughter.”

(*Cambridge Chronicle*, March 19th 1859)

[Key words: image vender; humour]

Body of Bacchus: 1859

Napoleon as an Italian Image-Boy.¹²⁶—Speaking to the Italians: “Buy my fine Image! Plon-Plon!¹²⁷ Little Plon-Plon! Pretty King! Corpo di Baccho, beautiful King!¹²⁸ Real Plaster of Paris! Buy my fine Image! Buy! Cheap—cheap. You shall have him for nothing!”

(*Lancaster Gazette*, October 1st 1859)

[Key words: Napoleon; image; plaster of Paris; political satire]

¹²⁶ Prince Napoleon-Jerome, Napoleon-Joseph-Charles-Paul Bonaparte (1822-1891). In 1859 married Princess Maria Clotilde of Savoy, daughter of Victor Emmanuel II, King of Sardinia. Commanded French forces in Tuscany during Second Italian War of Independence.

¹²⁷ “Plon Plon” was a term of derision used by troops who regarded Napoleon as a coward.

¹²⁸ Body of Bacchus: he was somewhat portly.

The Sculptor's Career: 1859

We are about to relate the true story of an artist— one of the very greatest England has yet produced.

The first scene lies in a shop in New-street, Covent Garden— a very small shop, full of plaster casts, by selling which the worthy but humble proprietor managed to maintain himself, his wife, and his two boys. Arranged on the shelves around the shop and in the windows were casts from the antique, which appealed to the classical tastes—casts of the Niobe, of the far-famed Venus de Medicis—

The bending statue that enchants the world¹²⁹—
of Hercules, Ajax, Achilles, and many more; but these were for the few, and art in England was then but in its infancy. For the less refined and more ordinary tastes there were casts of George II, then king; of Lord Howe and Admiral Hawke, then in the height of their fame—the naval darlings of England; of the brave General Wolfe, who gloriously fallen during that year (we are now speaking of the year 1759) on the heights of Québec, and with the praises of whose gallantry all England was then ringing; and there were also to be observed a few busts of the prominent-featured William Pitt, then a young man, but already a recognised orator in the English Commons;. Such were the mute humanities of he shop shelves; and from then we turned to the living inmates.

The master of the place might be observed, through a glass door which separated the back room from the front shop, busily engaged involving a figure of one of the new popular men of the day – Admiral Boscawen¹³⁰ ...

(*The Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser*,
August 13th 1859)

[Key words: casts; busts; Niobe; Venus de Medici; Hercules; Ajax; Achilles; George II, Howe; Hawke; Wolfe; Pitt; Boscawen]

Liberty: 1860

At either extremity of the table were placed the very familiar plaster of Paris images, known as the “Kneeling Samuel,” which our original typifier, Miss Dickey had painted black to the occasion; the one bearing as a placard the Macedonian cry, “Come over and help us!” the other, the memorable war cry of Patrick Henry, “Give me liberty, or give me death!”¹³¹

(Flanders 1860, 134)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; Samuel]

The Twin Fishers: 1860

THE TWIN FISHERS

A DIRGE — DEDICATED TO HENNIE AND ANNIE

Who is not acquainted with the two plaster-of-Paris images, borne about and sold by Italians, called the Twin Fishers? What lovely symbols of innocent childhood! In their aprons they essay to carry their fishes; but the

¹²⁹ Misquotation of James Thomson: “So stands the statue that enchants the world/So bending tries to veil the matchless boast/The mingled beauties of exulting Greece.” (*The Seasons* 1726-1730).

¹³⁰ Edward Boscawen (1628-1685). In 1759 commanded British naval forces in the Battle of Lagos.

¹³¹ “Come over and help us!” = Acts 16:9 – “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” “Give me liberty, or give me death!” = quote from Patrick Henry (1736-1799) Virginian Governor speaking against 1765 Stamp Act.

smooth-sided creatures of the stream are ever gliding out at the sides, and the innocent children elevate one side of the apron only to let them slide out the more surely on the other; and with what earnestness of look — half perplexity, because they are dropping out, and half admiration of the beautiful captives themselves — do they gaze at them jumping at their feet, while others still are falling from the carelessly-held apron! Many thoughts come up in our mind while beholding these lovely Twin Fishers. Though they are not of marble, and would perhaps never be thought of, in connection with exhibitions of statuary, as “things of art,” yet sure we are that there are many who *feel* the beauty of these images, where affectation of higher pretensions to taste would disown *seeing* it. No wonder, then, that these innocent little creatures are so popular as mantel and hearth ornaments. Thus, then, it came to pass that a pair of the Fishers had long graced the mantel of a parlor where we had enjoyed many a social hour. It came to pass, also, in the process of time, that on a sad and stormy day the veering wind sent a sudden blast down the chimney, the fire-board fell, and the little Fishers lay in wreck and ruin over the floor! Then it was that it fell to the Poet to allay the common grief, by the song of the Twin Fishers; and inasmuch as sorrow is lightened by being distributed, we invite the reader to join us in these measures of sorrow.

I.

How oft have ye cheered me, ye sweet, tuneful Nine,
 When dull, heavy sorrow has darkened my soul;
 Come now with a song to this sad heart of mine.
 And calm the rough billows that over me roll.
 O soothing consolors! ye only have skill
 To ease my heart's tremor, and bid it be still.

II.

Not selfishly sad do I call for your aid;
 Not mine was the first bitter draught of this woe;
 On friends of my heart the bereavement is laid,
 And theirs are the tears with which mine own now flow.
 Give words that upon their storm'd spirits shall fall
 Like the music of David on the sad heart of Saul.

III.

Let me touch, Muses! your tenderest vein,
 And call forth your sympathy freely and true ;
 Lend, lend me your numbers, and lead on the strain,
 Till I sing all the sorrowful story to you —
 A story beginning all cheerful as light.
 But ending as sad and as fearful as night!

IV.

O joy on the day when from Italy's strand —
 Yes, Italy, land of soft airs and bright skies —
 Came the wit of the head and the skill of the hand,
 That for pleasure of others so wittingly plies,
 From flour of plaster the image to mould.
 To Nature so true, with its graces untold!

V.

Yes, joy above all, on that happiest hour.
 When, with high inspiration, the artist conceived
 This finest, most graceful display of his power,
 Which praise above all, and from all, has received.
 When the little Twin Fishers stood graceful to view,

Joy shone in his eyes like the sun in the dew.

VI.

The Brother as mild as a morning in May,
The Sister as meek as a cherub — they stand ;
And, bearing the little pet fishes away.
They glide through the apron and slip through the hand.
Such innocent looks of contentment and love,
We are wont to transfer to the cherubs above.

VII.

Sweet picture of childhood! — that holiest time!
No shadow of sorrow has darkened their brows;
With hearts that hear music from Heaven's pure clime,
With love never checked by perfidious vows.
O beautiful Fishers! how mild and how sweet,
With the pets in their aprons, the pets at their feet.

VIII.

When Hennie and Annie had purchased the pair,
And bore them with fondness away in their arms ;
The act, to the thoughtful, was evidence rare
That their hearts were well used to the purest of charms.
And there, 'neath the mantel, the Twin Fishers stood.
The joy of the pure, and the praise of the good.

IX.

But oh! that misfortune should sadden my song,
And shadows should darken the joys that I sing!
But earth never leaves us the beautiful long,
And sweetest of flowers first attract the keen sting!
'Tis sad — yet 'tis well, for if this were not so,
We might sell our bright Heaven for the bright things below

X.

Sad day when the storm, roaring fierce round the roof,
Sent a blast down the chimney, so sudden and strong
That the fire-board yielded — the nails were not proof
For the strength of the wind that bore down on it long.
The dear little Fishers, so lovely before,
A wreck and a ruin were found on the floor !

XI.

How changed is the place! Though new taste and new care
Have been busy around where the ruin was wrought ;
In vain would the fresh-painted fire-board there
Beguile the sad eye — it is nought! it is nought !
No! gone and for ay, is the charm and the pride,
The mantel is lone with no pets at its side!

(Harbaugh 1860, 140)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; Italians; sentimentality;
mantelpiece]

A matter of course: 1862

The use of a piano! The instrument is there, as a matter of course—like the plaster images on the mantelpiece, and the portrait of the host or hostess, in the dining-room—but it is not jangling from morning to night, and indeed is seldom touched except during the brief gloaming before the candles are lighted.

(*The South Australian Advertiser*, December 8th 1862)
[Key words: plaster; images; mantelpiece]

A Secret of the Trade: 1863

Buy My Images!—Galignani's *Messenger* relates the following as an actual occurrence:¹³²

“Leon Gozlan said, one evening, in the green room of the *Theatre Français*, that, perplexed at seeing the Italian image sellers eternally hawking their tray of statuettes on their heads through the streets, without a human creature ever appearing to bargain for any, he asked one of those vendors if he had exercised that profession long.¹³³ ‘Thirty years,’ replied the man. ‘And did you ever,’ continued the author of the *Medecin de Perq*, ‘happen to sell one of your figures?’ ‘Never, sir.’ Gozlan reflected for some time on the strangeness of the answer, and then said, ‘My good man, do me the favor to tell me why you have been thus walking about, for the last thirty years with the load upon your head? Is it in obedience to a vow you have made?’ ‘No, sir, certainly not; it is to get my living—that is the only reason.’ ‘But you say you never sell anything.’ ‘I never sell anything, it is true,’ returned the man, ‘but there are so many clumsy people in the world that a day never passes without some one running against me and upsetting my board. My figures are thus broken, and a crowd collects and makes the person pay for them all!

(*Portland Daily Advertiser*, April 23rd 1863)

[Key words: Italian; image sellers; destruction; humour] [See also 1895]

The Organ Grinders: 1863

A Philadelphia contemporary congratulates its readers on being relieved of the presence of the Lazaroni of the city as represented by the organ grinders, plaster of Paris image makers, etc. It says: “Essex Street, in old Moyamensing, once the abode of the Lazaroni— monkeys, hand organs, hurdy-gurdies, trained dogs and kangaroos—is now as quiet as a churchyard.¹³⁴ There is a cause for the absence of the lazy Bohemians. The enforcement of the draft frightened them from their propriety, if they ever had any. The old and young, the blind and the crippled, supposed that they were all to be pressed into the service of the country. It never was in their contemplation to fight. Their mission was to supply music for the million and thus awaken pleasing thoughts. Such a thing as drawing a sword, or shouldering a musket, was too horrible to them for contemplation. The enroller, whose bailiwick included the abode of the Lazaroni, made his appearance one day. It required several hours before he could obtain a proper idea of spelling the names that were given him. Besides this drawback, the effluvia arising from the abiding places of men and monkeys were such as to nauseate the feelings of the representative of our venerable Uncle Samuel.

(*The Daily Intelligencer*, July 30th 1863)

[Key words: Lazaroni; racism; plaster of Paris; image; makers]

¹³² Galignani's *Messenger* = an English language newspaper published in Paris.

¹³³ Léon Gozlan (1803-1866); French writer.

¹³⁴ Moyamensing = an early township, later a neighbourhood of South Philadelphia.

Fertiliser: 1863

I remember seeing you, some 12 years since, in the parlour of Halls hotel in Wilmington, on one the occasion of one of the agricultural anniversaries of your county society, when Dr Maize stated that the fertilizing affects of plaster were first made known from the fact of the grass growing with unusual fertility where the maker of plaster of Paris images had shaken his bags.

(*Farmer and Gardener*, Vol 5, No 5 November 1863)
[Key words: plaster of Paris; images]

Nashville traders after the Civil War: 1865

They take in all classes and orders of traders, from the solid and respectable Broadway merchant to the Chatham-street Israelite and the Italian image-vender.

(*New York Times*, April 16th, 1865)
[Key words: Italian; image vender]

Nodding: 1865

What wonder, then, that you have got to look around the ballroom towards midnight to see every one of the heads of the aged dames in black stuff nodding away, as though they were so many plaster casts of cats with movable necks arranged along the board of some Italian image seller?

(Mayhew 1865, 55)
[Key words: plaster casts, cats, noddors, Italian, image-seller]

A monument in Aberdeen: 1866

That of the Prince Consort is a monument of high-backed chair and jack-boots.¹³⁵ From one point of view you cannot see the Prince for chair from another you cannot see him for robes, and from a third you cannot see him for boots. The Prince is better represented in a sixpenny chimney ornament.

(*Border Watch*, February 3rd 1866)(South Australia)
[Key words: mantelpiece; ornament]

Hospitality: 1866

He had, before calling, purchased an old-fashioned plaster image from an Italian, and put it into his coat pocket.

After his examination of the house one of the occupants presented him with the figure, which had been dexterously extracted from his pocket, whether as a specimen of skill, or as a hint that the visitor had been treated with a certain amount of hospitality, was not clear.

(Anon 1866, 232)
[Key words: Italian; plaster; image; crime; humour]

¹³⁵ Refers to a statue of Prince Albert by Carlo Marochetti unveiled in 1863.

Extinction: 1867

The Italian plaster image makers have become almost extinct. The cheapness of engravings has driven plaster casts out of the market.

(Memphis Daily Appeal, May 30th 1867)

[Key words: Italian; plaster; image; casts; extinction]

Peregrinating merchant: 1867

...I had seen many of Ristori's compatriots engaged in the peanut trade, while others trafficked in plaster cats; and only the other day I came upon another who was disturbing the piece with a beastly organ and a dyspeptic-looking monkey...He aroused himself, however, and obligingly volunteered to find the place which he was eminently capable of doing, being, as he tersely remarked, predisposed toward peanuts from his earliest infancy, and of course, "up in his Italian." Furthermore, at a later period in his life, he had been walloped by a vender of plaster images for having in the exuberance of his youthful spirits indiscreetly fired a stick of stovewood into the stock in trade of this peregrinating merchant, much to its detriment.

(Delaware Gazette, February 1st 1867)

[Key words: plaster cats; peregrinating merchant; destruction]

Organ-Grinders and Image-Peddlers: 1867**Their Habits and Peculiarities**

The Italians have been characterized by a witty Bohemian in one of our city dailies as [a] nation whose chief industry is organ-grinding, and whose principal export is macaroni. It is curious that although nearly all organ grinders other countries are Italian, they are rarely seen in Italy itself.

Both organ-grinders and image-peddlers are much less numerous in this city than before the late war. The army and the general activity of all branches of industry attracted them from their callings by superior remuneration. The industrial arts in Italy are comparatively few especially and the long-misgoverned southern portion, lately known as the Neapolitan dominions. There abound the lazzaroni, who are rarely acquainted with trades, and who gather a precarious subsistence by begging or doing odd jobs.¹³⁶ It is from these that spring the two classes here discussed.

Naturally on arriving in a strange land, they seize upon pursuits that require no previous preparation. Europeans of the Latin race, comprising Italians, Spaniards and French, are not prone to emigrate. They enjoy bright skies and a mild air, their simple food is acquired the little labor, a lax morality gratifies their animal instincts with slight seeking, and the ignorance both debars aspiration and withdraws knowledge of more prosperous regions. They are contented at home.

The southern Italians are quick-witted and prompt at repatee, and much resemble the Irish in their inexhaustible fund of humor. They are indolent simply from position; with sufficient motive they are readily attracted to labor.

It has long been a custom both here and in Europe for speculative Italians to induce their southern countrymen to emigrate, by paying their passage and loaning their organs for street music. The conditions are that a

¹³⁶ "Lazzaroni" = the poorest of the lower classes in Naples, named after the St Lazarus hospital.

certain sum should be brought home nightly, the overplus being retained by the employee. This business has been conducted in past years with great success, and has in many countries realized moderate fortunes. In this city there are establishments, also, where organs are loaned for about twenty-five cents a day, to itinerants, who often realize from two to three dollars daily by their use.

The organ grinders monkey

A more exulted step in the scale of the profession is to carry a monkey, but this requires capital, and can not be freely undertaken. A well trained monkey is valued at from fifty to a hundred dollars according to his accomplishments. There are professional trainers of the animals, and if an unschooled monkey is brought for instruction, at least fifty dollars is charged for his board and tuition. Monkeys of the freshman class commence by dancing, or giving a series of jumps as the organ plays. This is easily learned, and is facilitated by jerks with a rope. To this they add jumping on and off the organ, when bid.

The "Sophs" become accomplished in taking off and re-adjusting their caps and passing a hoop from head to foot. Beating a tambourine and holding individually to the crowd for money, requires the matured intellect of a graduate. He that fiddles deserves in his diploma.

Among the classes Italian here specified may be included the street musician of the fiddler and harp order. They are individuals naturally gifted and acquire the skills solely by ear, with a slight mechanical teaching from companions. Of musical annotation they know nothing. All these people are apt, on arrival, to betake themselves to the vicinity of the Five Points, where both sexes, to the number of a dozen or more, occupy promiscuously one room, and sleep in an atmosphere of dirt, grease and mingled with the fumes of bodies more or less diseased.¹³⁷ The floor, or a thin, filthy mattress, is their only bedding, the ragged blanket of the most repulsive kind. In the hot nights of summer they fly from this atmosphere of vermin and suffocation to the roof, while their fellow-lodgers, Irish and colored, resort to the carts lying in the street, or to the sidewalk. A philosophy of life with these poor people is, not how much comfort can be secured, how much discomfort avoided

What they eat.

The food of Italian Lazzaroni upon the coast consists largely of what they call *frutti de mare*, or fruit of the sea. This comprises fish or any incomprehensible, inchoate being, that may be hauled in a net. Of these any fisherman has an abundant experience. They are eaten and relished. Nothing comes unwelcome to their mouths. The drawing of a fish is considered unnecessary. He is fried with garlic as nature created him, the scales merely being scraped off. Entrails are considered unctuous, and no mean portion of the food. Wheat of late years being high in price, maccaroni is much less used by them than formerly. They content themselves with coarse bread, and cheese from the milk of sheep and goats. Meat is rarely purchased. It is too expensive. Their drink is water, mingled with a cheap and sour red wine. Coffee is rarely taken; tea never.

On arrival here, their *frutti de mare* becomes limited. They content themselves with such fish as our own market affords, and this been no cheaper than meat, the latter receives a share of attention. Cheese is unattainable, the wine of Italy can only be substituted by that France, which is beyond their purses. They console themselves themselves with

¹³⁷ "Five Points" was a notorious New York "slum."

lager beer, and eke out a repast with bread and onions, macaroni being added as an occasional luxury. Vegetables, other than onions, but few relish. Fruit they are indifferent to, with the exception of musk and watermelons, which they have been sometimes accustomed to in abundance at home. It may be said of the Italians in New York that they rarely give trouble to the police. They are quiet, law-abiding citizens, and live much about themselves.

The organ grinder at home.

A dawning of prosperity often creates a removal from the Five Points proximity to the more commodious lodgings of the district west of Broadway, between Canal and Houston streets. Thereabout in in Sullivan, Laurens and Macdougall street, they may be found, still in rickety old back tenements, where stairs give an uncertain foothold, and carpets are an undreamed luxury, but less crowded numbers and in a purer atmosphere. A glance at their rooms reveals bare floors, three legged stools, tables of pine, or mahogany long innocent of polish, but no evidence of filth nauseates a visitor.

Clothing lately washed hangs in the yard: Pantaloon with colossal patches of many colours, and coarse stockings that might have been targets for bullets; but these are mingled to the eye with window sills garnished by refreshing plants and brilliant flowers.

Dances periodically occur, to the violin and harp, with a gaiety totally free from disorder. As with the Germans, the old partake as well as the young, and here they indulge in snatches of costume worn by them at home. A white Neapolitan headdress sometimes appears among the women, as also a bright red handkerchief, thrown loosely over the hair. These charming intimations of a poetic land redeem dingy walls and smoky lamps, and earn for dark eyed wearers a gaze oblivious of all surroundings.

Advance in Life

In these houses, many of the occupants have relinquished the precarious livelihood of street musician or image-selling, and have adopted trades. They enter sugar refineries or confectioneries, toy factories, and wine establishments, and obtain permanent occupation at image casting. A few become cooks, waiters and street laborers. A number are now employed upon the Brooklyn Park at \$1.60 a day. The women soon imagine that tambourine playing is not reputable, although, if pretty, no man ever refuses his contribution, and they branch off into other pursuits. Artificial flower making and the packing of confectionery are the chief occupations of their choice. A French confectioner in Broadway, who manufactures largely, has his establishment filled with Italian girls.

Soon another step is taken in the social scale, and with increased means and increased pride a removal is made by both sexes into an eligible tenement house, where they become lost in the mass of the American people, learn English, and possess nothing distinctive but their dark eyes and hair. They intermarry with Americans, and the children know nothing of the parental tongue.

Image makers complain of the decadence of their business. In former days the educated classes, who learned mythology and could appreciate a Venus, the Graces or a Cupid, were not above installing plaster images upon a mantelpiece. Plaster is now at a discount. Parian marble and clay only, are countenanced. The great American people at large may indulge in plaster, but they are quite innocent of mythology. It is not a public school study. They turn from Venus and the Graces to the

more vivid realisations of the Black Crook.¹³⁸ Gen. Washington, however, they have heard of, and they buy him tolerably; Lincoln also, and Grant; Sherman and Sheriden sparsely; other generals not at all; McClellan is “played out” as the dealers assert.¹³⁹ A high tariff tendency leads still to a few purchases of Clay.¹⁴⁰ Webster is nowhere.¹⁴¹ What is he but a great name? What legacy of goodness has he left to the land? With God-like attributes, he sold himself to the slave power for the pottage of a hope for presidency. He has earned oblivion, and the image venders declare he has gained it.—*New York Post*.

(*St. Johnsbury Caledonian*, December 27th 1867) (Vermont)

[Key words: Italians; image-peddlers; taste; Venus; Graces; Cupid; Black Crook; Washington; Lincoln; Grant; Sherman; Sheriden; McClellan; Clay; Webster]

Christmas 1868

And then up the hill and over to the north end, and as far as we could get the horses up into Moon Court, that they might seem to the Italian image-man who gave Lucy the boy and dog in plaster, when she was sick in the spring. The children had, you know, the choice of where they would go, and they selected their best friends, and will be more apt to remember the Italian image-man than Chrysostom himself, though Chrysostom should have “made a few remarks” to them seventeen times in the chapel.¹⁴² Then the Italian image-man heard for the first time in his life

“Now is the time of Christmas come,”

and

“Jesus in his babes abiding.”

(Hale 1868, 275)

[Key words: Italian; image man; boy and dog; plaster]

Savings 1869

I went to the Catholic chapel; and as I stood up while others were kneeling, I found my coat tugged at violently. This was occasioned by a combination of Roman Catholic and Italian zeal. The tug of recognition came from an Italian boy, a Piedmontese image-seller, whom we had met with before on the road— a spirited lad, who refused a shilling Torlonia offered him, and said he had saved enough by selling images and other Italian articles to buy himself land in Savoy. I understood him to say £80; but that is probably a mistake. He has however, been several years in England.

(Robinson 1869, 276)

[Key words: Italian; boy; image-seller; Piedmontese; earnings]

Even in Peking: 1870

Ma un mi amio di Lucca che fa gatti
Li fa cor gesso, creda, da sbagliassi

¹³⁸ *The Black Crook* was the first successful Broadway musical, and ran for 474 performances in 1866.

¹³⁹ Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), US Civil War General in Union Army and was 18th President of the US; William T Sherman (1820-1891), US Civil War General in Union Army; Philip H. Sheriden, US Civil War General in the Union Army; General George B. McClellan (1826-1885) was a Union commander and later politician, becoming Governor of New Jersey.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Clay (1777-1852), politician and lawyer.

¹⁴¹ Daniel Webster (1782-1852) was a US politician who stood unsuccessfully for the presidency three times.

¹⁴² John Chrysostom (c349-407) considered to be the greatest-ever Christian preacher.

Lui, vorsì di, ch'è stato fra' Mulatti,
 Ch'ha visitato anch'e' Paesi Bassi,
 M'ha detto che neppure in der Pehino,
 Luminare di Pisa 'un se ne vede.¹⁴³

(Renato Fucini)

But a friend of mine that makes cats,
 He makes them of plaster; believe me, you can confuse them with
 real ones,
 I'll tell you, he's been around South America,
 And he's also visited the Netherlands,
 He told me that even in Peking,
 He sees the Luminara di Pisa.

[Key words: cats; plaster; South America; Netherlands; China]

Street cries of New York: 1870

Various cries are occasionally to be heard throughout the city, the significance of which can only be guessed at from the kind of wares hawked by the utterers of them. Peddlers, with baskets full of fancy glassware, – jars, vases, and other such knick-knacks as are used for table or chimney-piece ornaments, –carry on their business in the by-streets. They utter low, droning cries from time to time, as they slowly place along by the area railings, but it is generally impossible to recognise any verbal combination in their smothered accents.

(Dawson 1870, 204)

[Key words: cries; mantelpiece; ornaments]

The taste of women: 1870

Strange and noticeable, too, is the taste of women in the cheap chimney ornament line. Mysterious animals (shapen with equal fidelity to a horse or a pig) are banded, and spotted, and ringed, as surely never four-footed beasts were before! Rare specimens of pink-nosed poodles, and of spotted tom-cats with ferocious whiskers and gooseberry eyes, predominate; but the popular fancy also inclines to members of the Highland brigade done in crockery, and to likenesses of Napoleon crossing the Alps on a jibbing horse, and pointing at nothing in the distance.

(*Illustrated Sydney News* December 24th 1870)

[Key words: mantelpiece; gender; horse; pig; dog; cat; Highland soldiers; Napoleon]

A new manufactory: 1870

Canton has a new manufactory, located on fifth street. Company—some Italians; products, plaster paris images [sic].

(*The Democratic Press*, July 21st 1870) (Ohio)

[Key words: Italians; plaster of Paris; images]

¹⁴³ Mulatto is an archaic term for those of mixed black and white parentage, but was also used without insult to identify South Americans; "Pehino" = archaic Italian for Beijing; "Luminare di Pisa" = a candle-lit festival of St Ranieri on June 16th in Pisa.

MP: 1870

Mr Mundella, Member of Parliament for Sheffield England, who is to succeed John Bright in case the latter retires from the cabinet, is said to have first entered Sheffield as an Italian image boy.

(*Daily Alta*, June 5th 1870)

[Key words: Italian; image boy]

Outrage: 1871

A Pottsville paper tells the following: a party of for men had been out gunning, and upon returning to town found an itinerant Italian image peddler in the street, who they directed to stand off a certain number of paces, and keep the rack of images upon the top of his head while they shot them off. The poor fellow protested against such a procedure—cried, begged and plead to be let off—but all to no effect. He was compelled to stand the test, and did so until the gunners had shot the last image away from over his head.—Not content with this outrage, they then refused to pay the Italian for the damage done, and he was compelled to leave town a very poor man.

(*The Bloomfield Times*, September 12th 1871)

[Key words: Italian; image peddler; violence]

Little Italian boys: 1871

The traffic in little Italian boys, who are sent to America to play fiddles and vend plaster images, has opened briskly this year.

(*The Evening Telegraph*, March 28th 1871)

[Key words: Italian; boys; plaster; images]

How to pay: 1872

The next case arose from the Italian image man having been detected breaking our city bylaws, in not providing himself at Hawker's license. In broken English he stated that, as he modelled his own ware, he did not require one. He had never been interfered with in Sydney. His worship failed to fall in with the culprit's views, and advised him to take out his license forthwith. The poor fellow seemed perfectly willing to do this on the matter being explained to him the only obstacle in the way appeared to be as to how he was to pay for it. Without the Council will take the fee out in chimney ornaments, to adorn the Council Chambers.

(*The Evening Star*, March 12th 1872) (Auckland NZ)

[Key words: Italian; image man; mantelpiece; ornaments]

Gentle Italian: 1872

—Ye gentle Italian perambuleth ye streets with ye Plaster of Paris images.

(*The St Cloud Journal*, June 13th 1872) (Minnesota)

[Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images]

Wonders of a boarding house: 1872

A ceiling or a chimney ornament which are neither of them cracked.

(*Mariposa Gazette* November 1st 1872)
[Key words: mantelpiece; ornament]

Bedizened with plaster images: 1873

To the credit of very many of them be it said that they have made their little cottages neat and comfortable. In cottage after cottage you will find the polished mahogany chest of drawers as the principal article of sitting-room furniture. It is placed opposite the outer door of the cottage to attract the attention of the visitor and the passer-by. Then to the right of the door as you enter is a table covered with a bright cloth, and bedizened with plaster images and little glass vases. An eight-day clock stands in a convenient corner. It is none of your Dutch or American time-keepers, but the good old English article, about seven feet in height with an immense dial on top, and something like a room door in front. The chimney piece and stove are brilliant in brass and black lead.

(*Empire*, May 8th 1873) (Sydney)
[Key words: cottages; plaster images]

Cockshyes 2: 1873

Then an Italian, with a lot of plaster casts, committed the unpardonable sin of coming into the Close without leave, and his wares were taken, and put up for “cock-shyes.” (Hughes 1873, 33)

(Hughes, Thomas (1873) *Memoir of a Brother*)
[Key words: Italian; plaster casts; destruction]

The inquiring husband: 1873

About this time the frugal housewife finds herself compelled to admit to her inquiring husband that she traded off his winter overcoat last July for the plaster image which Johnny broke.

(*The Jackson Standard*, November 27th 1873)(OH)
[Key words: plaster; image; clothing exchange]

Bloodthirsty preparations: 1874

In Springfield, Mass., an Italian vender was robbed of several plaster images in a tenement house. He went straight across the street and put the remainder of his wares in a safe place. He took off his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves above the elbows, draw a long knife, and pulled his hat down on his head in a determined way. Then he started for the tenement house with five-foot strides, remarking that blood was going to flow. On the way he was met by a trembling little boy who handed him the stolen image and scampered back into the house, from which the bloodthirsty preparations have been watched.

(*American Citizen*, March 21st 1874) (MA)
[Key words: Italian; plaster; images; humour]

Brittle wares: 1874

It is seldom now that we see about the streets that familiar figure of our youthful days, the Italian image seller, with his plaintive cry “Buy my images.” Cynics used to assert that these itinerant vendors never sold any

of their brittle wares, but that once or twice a day they used to run accidentally against a prosperous-looking benevolent old gentleman, overturn the contents of their board, and receive on the spot liberal compensation for the damage effected. But this theory cannot be strictly true, as it does not account for the existence of those numerous plaster busts which ornament the fanlights of shabby-genteel lodging houses, and which have evidently been obtained by the landladies of these establishments by purchase or barter.

(*The Graphic*, January 10th 1874)

[Key words: Italian; image seller; cry; humour; plaster of Paris; busts]

Duet: 1874

Mrs Partridge's hoops, the hairbrushes, the wax fruit, hymn book and the plaster image of little Samuel saying his prayers in a nightshirt with a stubby-nosed angel in a bolster-case watching him—All of these things were hurled furiously at the unseen cats; and still the duet proceeded.

(*The Andrew County Republican*, October 9th, 1874)(Savannah, MO)

[Key words: Plaster; image; Samuel; angel]

The Italian image man: 1874

PLASTER CASTS

THE IMAGE VENDER AND HIS WARES

One seldom sees in New-York—the more's the pity—the familiar figure to Londoners of the Italian image man. Dressed in black velveteens, for which he appears to have a peculiar affection, and balancing his tray of plaster casts upon his head, he makes the air musical with his low-pitched long-drawn-out cry of “Buy my images, fine images.”

[...]

Doubtless Italian image men may have wandered to other parts of the world, but it is only in London that a market sufficiently remunerative can be found for the wares in which our friends deal. For, truth to tell, it seldom happens that they have anything on their trays which has the least pretension to artistic merit. Their purchasers are, for the most part, among people in humble circumstances who have still something for superfluities. The wife of the British workmen has one spot of which she is especially proud, and to adorn it she is willing to make some sacrifice. This is the mantelshelf over the fireplace. This favourite place is generally loaded with a variety of ornaments of the most singular description. Among them the images of the Italian vendor occupy a prominent position. Statuettes of royal personages, busts of the Great Duke, cats and dogs *couchant*, and occasionally miniature palaces, which can be illuminated from the interior, are the staple wares.¹⁴⁴ But there are venders who strike for more remunerative trade, who in some way get molds of artistic reductions of antiques, and present really exquisite casts to the educated families of small means who live in the suburbs. As a general thing the bargaining is done by the fair sex in the absence of their liege lords, and as they invariably shrink with horror from the prices asked, they are usually

¹⁴⁴ The “Great Duke” was Wellington.

inveigled into giving into giving in exchange for a bust of Clite or of Niobe, or statuette of the Venus de Medicis, an amount of cast-off male clothing worth about four times the price demanded.

Although it is just as well that our fair housekeepers should not be exposed to this danger, it is a great pity that there is so small a demand for plaster casts in America. Somehow our hearts are been lifted up by great prosperity and we have a soul above plaster. If we could afford marble, then, of course, we should be only too glad to possess reductions of those famous antiques whose beauty has intoxicated the world. Why there should be a prejudice against an article for its cheapness is hard to understand, but it is the fact that the dislike of plaster has its origin in this sentiment. It is true that when a mold has been used many times the value of the cast as a faithful copy of the original is greatly lessened. But the cost of making a gelatine mold is so little that no workman would think of making many casts from it. And it is undeniable that the original can be reproduced with almost faultless accuracy by casting. This is the great advantage that the sculptor has over the painter, that his works can be repeated almost to infinity. All these beautiful statues, which we so admire and name name antiques, are proofs of this. They are not originals; those have long since perished, or are hidden still in the bosom of the earth. The statues, the torsos we possess are simply copies, rendering more or less faithfully, according to the whim of the purchaser, some extraordinary work of genius which the earlier epochs of Greek art had given to the world.

[...]

One of the results of the application of molds to antique statuary has being to give to almost all art students the same models of beauty for their instruction. In every art school throughout America there will be found almost precisely the same figures. Everyone has its Venus De Medicis and De Milo, its Venus at the Bath, its Fates, its Laocoon, its Hercules of Glykon, its Theseus and Ilyssus, its Germanicus, its Fighting Gladiator, its Dying Gladiator, its Knife-Sharpener, its Apollo Belvedere, its busts of Euripides, of Augustus Caesar, of Niobe, Clite, Paris, its Supplicating Youth, its Dancing Fawn, its Salinus with the Youthful Bacchus. Some have many more but these are universal. If one could examine the art schools in England he would find exactly the same figures. In France, Germany, and Russia they would still be found repeated in plaster, and occupying the energies of art students. In Italy the scholars of art have such a wealth of originals that plaster cast are not so prominent, but there are not a few commercial and manufacturing cities in the North of Italy where designers learn the rudiments of the industry by studying the lines of these deathless forms from the universal plaster. And it is much to be desired that ladies of refinement would admit plaster casts into their houses in spite of the material, rather than the flashy, flimsy meretricious Parian marbles which are now so much in vogue. It must be acknowledged that the material of the latter is so delicate in texture, so admirably pure in colour, that is at excellently suited for the representation of the human form. But the subjects rendered in it are almost invariably the most trashy kind, such as Peris flying to Paradise, Venuses coming out of enormous oyster-shells, and other forms all of the same weak order of sentimentality

[....]

One can learn how to see and how to appreciate the beautiful perfectly well from the casts

[....]

As such [the Venus de Milo] is as admirable teacher of the beautiful as can be found. Therefore its multiplication by plaster casts would be an essential benefit. The statuettes and busts which are to be found in so many drawing rooms, are nearly all in marble or terracotta. Plaster seems to be rejected by all save artists, painters, and sculptors, and the circles which they control. When this prejudice against plaster is removed, and in every drawing-room and parlour one shall find casts of the water-carrier and the Venus of Milo; the time will not be far distant when the country will assume that artistic character which nature has evidently predestined it.¹⁴⁵

(*New York Times*, April 5th 1874)

[Key words: Italian; costume; plaster; casts; tray; cry; art; royalty; Wellington; cats; dogs; illuminations; Clite; Niobe; Venus de Medici; manufacture; techniques; Parian; education; Venus de Milo]

“The Image-Seller” 1874

(From a painting exhibited in the French Gallery, London.)¹⁴⁶

The artist has chosen for the subject of the beautiful painting from which this engraving is made an incident frequently witnessed in the villages of Italy. An itinerant image-seller stops to display his tempting wares to a couple of pretty peasant girls, who lean with the placid attention over the railing of the portico or porch which gives such a picturesque appearance to Italian cottages. They do not seem inclined to purchase. The image-seller apparently cannot supply them with just the cast they want to adorn their wall, or perhaps he is not willing to come down in his price. They are great hagglers, these Italian peddlers, whatever sort of wares they bring for sale, and will stand by the hour wrangling over a penny. In the end the peasant girl will get the image if she wants it, and the peddler will go away grumbling, and secretly glad to have made a better bargain than he expected. These itinerant image-sellers often find their way to this country, and their hoarse and discordant cry of “Images!” is frequently heard in far inland towns and villages, as well as in the larger cities. They are rarer now than a few years ago, the demand for plaster casts having been replaced by a love of photographs, engravings, chromos, and illustrated books; and now, instead of a small dingy cast of “Little Samuel” in the familiar attitude, or of the “Father of his Country,” we find in rural parlours tastefully framed family portraits drawn by the son himself, engravings of famous statesman or generals, or reproductions of some interesting historical event.¹⁴⁷

At the same time excellent plaster casts may be had, at a very low price, taken from that great masterpieces of antiquity, and these must not be confounded with the cheap and common specimens brought around by ordinary image-sellers.

(*Harper’s Weekly* January 31st 1874, 113)

[Key words: Italy; image-seller; selling; cry; decline; Samuel; Washington; antiquity]

¹⁴⁵ The “Water Carrier” was an Egyptian statue.

¹⁴⁶ Gallery in Pall Mall, 1854-1929

¹⁴⁷ Chromos = chromolithographs: coloured prints using lithography; “Father of his Country” = George Washington.

Worship in Nicaragua: 1875

Disposed according to principles of order incomprehensible, a crowd of dolls, beasts, from “Noah’s Ark” boxes figures off cakes and plaster-of-paris images. On the Tower of Babel was set out a doll’s tea service. Tin soldiers marching in order undisturbable under parsley trees, though against them, smiling but terrible, advanced a China shepherdess with the evident resolve of eating up those little warriors. The lamb she led scowled ferociously. Herod, near by, wore a tinsel helmet. Pontius Pilate shone forth in a breast-plate made up of four spangles sewn together. Flying cupids, each provided with a decent spangle about the waste, hovered over the scene. In the immediate foreground, before the foot-lights, stood as many images of the sort of retailed by Italian boys in Europe as the householder could lay hands on. Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi and the late Emperor Napoleon were everywhere represented. The Venus de Medici, attired in satin, had her place in several shows; in one, where her figure was larger, she was posted outside the stage for adoration of the faithful. In another place I saw half a dozen women telling their beads before Venus in a blue petticoat, of plaster representing a ballet girl pirouetting dressed in blue silk and offered for worship—not in vain. Such is the religion of Central America. Were not the old idols more dignified?—*All the Year Round*

(*The New North-West*, January 8th 1875) (Oregon)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; Italian boys; Victor Emmanuel; Garibaldi, Napoleon III; Venus de Medici]

A weight of care and images: 1875

... He was a home-made Italian, or an uncertain German . Upon his head , showing him to be a well-organized balancer, he carried a tray of plaster-of-paris images—little Samuels, full-grown Moseses, and the Muses . He came in just before lunch-time—a time when man’s better nature does not get the advantage of his appetite. He offered to sell us two of the *Muses* because, we suppose, he thought they would amuse us! [No hilarity, James.] He said the price was one dollar and seventy-five cents for the pair! The gentlemen present (waiting to accompany us to lunch) guyed the image-vendor, and ridiculed him for his avariciousness, as it might be. The image-man, not to be diverted from his fell purpose (vide cheap novels), fell to one dollar and sixty cents; but, like Enoch Arden, no sale.¹⁴⁸ Sad and discouraged, for he was selling for the conventional poor widow, he turned him toward the door; but, casting a beseeching look behind him, he stood as if undecided—as if his parents were dead, and he was left alone in this unfeeling world. That look touched us to the heart—yea, to our heart of hearts—and the charitable nature of our composition asserted its supremacy. We strided—strode sounds better. We strode to where the poor man stood, his chest upheaving with its weight of care and woe and images. “How much did you say?” was our cheering question. “A dollar and sixty cents,” was his sorrowful rejoinder. “Throw off the dollar, and it’s a trade.” “Take ’em; they are yours.” The bargain was clinched, yet we had made the offer not in sincerity, but to show that we possessed money, and to teach a lesson to the mean gentlemen who impatiently awaited our coming. Not having the sixty cents handy, for it was not a good day for

¹⁴⁸ “Enoch Arden” was the tragic hero of Tennyson’s 1864 poem.

gathering in money, we offered to resell the Muses to the vendor for fifty cents. “Not wort’ so muchee—I geef you thairty!” And “thairty” it was. When that image man went out, his face was radiant with joy, and we felt that we had, unintentionally, done at least *one* good action that day. [You heard him boasting, in a beer saloon, how he had got the best of a *greenhorn*? That cannot be possible. Jimmy. You got one of the beers on it, did you, and that’s how you *know* its true? Well, well, the world is all a sham, and want and penury and gratitude are all a delusion.]

(*New York Clipper*, September 11th 1875)

[Key words: Italian; German; plaster of Paris; Samuel; Moses; Muses; humour]

Avalanche of plaster: 1875

Photographs seem to be decidedly on the decline [in Paris]; ladies and gentlemen now inundate salons, the former with their statuettes, the latter with their medallions. It is an avalanche of plaster, sufficient to make an Italian image-seller crazy. Naughty boys, it is said, make butts of these productions, as they do of speaking dolls, for their drawing room carabines.¹⁴⁹ One advantage, and it is an omnipotent one, statuettes possess over photos; they hide wrinkles, and further cause the figure to look younger.

(*Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, February 10th 1875)

[Key words: Paris; plaster; statuettes, Italian; image-seller]

Images at Eton: 1875

The room was quite small...some little carved brackets of stained wood held little plaster figures, not badly modelled, in which an Italian image-seller drove a brisk trade amongst the boys.

(Oliphant 1875, 717)

[Key words: plaster; figures; Italian; image seller]

Curiously-wrought infants: 1875

The Firemen’s Cemetery was the scene of many floral offerings, and crowds of people were there during the day.¹⁵⁰ Refreshment stands were at the entrances, and also the Italian image venders, offering curiously-wrought infants at prayer, and representations of healthy, shiney and most impossible angels.

(*New Orleans Republican*, November 2nd 1875)

[Key words: Italian; image venders; Samuel; angels]

Dickens’ bust: 1876

An Italian vendor of images was in town yesterday. His images were very pretty. He had a very good bust of Dickens. If he had dropped his basket he would have had at Dickens of a “bust,” sure enough.

(*Morning Clarion*, June 5th 1876)(NC)

¹⁴⁹ Boys use the statuettes as targets for toy guns.

¹⁵⁰ “The Firemen’s Cemetery” was probably Greenwood Cemetery, established by the New Orleans Firemen’s Charitable and Benevolent Association.

[Key words: Italian; images; bust; Dickens; basket; humour]

Italian climate: 1876

In Colorado they speak about their Italian climate, merely because when a man gets up in the morning he feels as if he were going around with a lot of plaster images on his head.

(*Lincoln County Advocate*, June 14th 1876)(SD)

[Key words: Italian; plaster; images]

One-eyed plaster of Paris: 1876

As soon as he can get some one-eyed plaster of Paris, an Italian image vendor intends to change all of his “Praying Samuels” into figures of “Tilden at the door of the White House.”¹⁵¹

(*New Orleans Republican*, August 8th 1876)

[Key words: plaster; Italian; image vendor; Samuel; Tilden]

A poetic medley: 1876

Referring to an entertainment given by Mr. Marshall and Miss Webster in Boston...Miss Webster [performed] ...a poetic medley entitled “The Vender’s Call” in which the street cries of peddlers and firemen were faithfully rendered and the sweet notes of an Italian image vender rendered with remarkable fidelity.

(*Cambridge Chronicle*, April 1st 1876)

[Key words: Italian; image; vender; entertainment]

The Italy Of Leather-lane: 1876

That they are harmless creatures enough there can be no doubt; indeed, while the stranger wonderingly regards them, there occurs an incident which, while it totally destroys the romance, serves to exculpate at least one of the cloaked, moustache-twirling patriarchs from all suspicion of being anything but an honest handicraftsman. A ragged young native of sunny Italy emerges from an alley, staggering under a head-load of chalk images and monuments, calls out to one of the seeming conspirators, evidently his master, and engages with him in brief converse, the subject of which, seemingly, is the victualling for the day of the image vendor, for the former enters a baker’s shop close at hand, and presently emerges with part of a loaf of the half-quartern size.¹⁵² But then comes the question, how is the lad to carry it? His old jacket is buttoned to his chin, and it is plain that an overture on the part of the aged man to break the bread in two pieces, and thrust one in each of the youth’s trousers-pockets, is not favourably regarded. At last the difficulty is overcome by the ingenuity of the master. He detaches an effigy of St. Paul’s Cathedral from the board on the lad’s head, squeezes the bread into the interior of the sacred edifice, first compressing it between his hands to make it fit, and St. Paul’s being then replaced, the boy goes on his way contented.

(Greenwood 1876, 111-112)

[Key words: Italy; chalk; images; St Paul’s Cathedral; humour]

¹⁵¹ Samuel Jones Tilden was Governor of New York and the unsuccessful Democratic candidate for the presidency in 1876.

¹⁵² “Half-quartern” = weighing two pounds.

Raising Cain: 1877

War maps are as abundant as leaves in autumn, and after studying one fifteen minutes, and attempting to pronounce the jaw breaking names, a fellow feels that life is a burden, and goes home and raises Cain with his wife for trading off his last summer's pants for a plaster paris [sic] image.¹⁵³

(*The Eaton Democrat*, 24th May 1877)
[Key words: clothing; plaster of paris; image]

Disagreeable force: 1877

The hills are looking beautiful. The rich hues of red, golden and green, make a lovely combination of tints that are heightened by coming in contact with the deep, heavenly blue of an autumnal sky. All nature looks as smiling and happy as a bride on the day of her nuptials. October has indeed been a glorious month, the absence of Jack Frost causing the foliage to await the touch of the orb of day, whose magic brush has no equal on God's footstool.¹⁵⁴ How beautiful it is to stand and gaze upon the enchanting scene. It fills one with sublime emotion, and makes him imagine himself an angel, until a blast from the north suddenly wakes him from his daydream, only to realise with all its disagreeable force that his wife unfeelingly traded off his last winter's ulster for a pair of plaster-of-paris images.

(*The Iola Register*, November 3rd, 1877) (Kansas)
[Key words: clothing exchange; humour; plaster of Paris; images]

Contrary accounts: 1877

Charge Against an Italian Lad—Antonelli Commanduci, and Italian image seller, was charged with stealing a coat, the property of Mr. Robson, of the Bute Dock New Works. The prosecutor having proved the loss of the coat, Dock-constable Pulman said he saw the prisoner carrying the coat by the West Dock, respecting the possession of which he gave contrary accounts. Prisoner pleaded not guilty, and said he bought the coat for 8s. He was committed for trial.

(*Western Mail*, August 11th 1877)
[Key words: Italian; image seller; crime]

Image vendors: 1877**St Patrick's Cemetery No.1.**

Going out Canal street this is the first of the ridge cemeteries, lying on the right hand side of the road. Here the reporter got out of the car, and was immediately surrounded by the usual crowd of boys, all inquiring at once, in the most solicitous manner, "want anything done today?" Declining their polite attentions, we walked on, to be assailed by the image and flower vendors, and, as we passed through the gate, by the ceaseless rattle of the orphan children and their tin alms plates.¹⁵⁵

(*The New Orleans Daily Democrat*, November 2nd 1877)

¹⁵³ "War" = the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.

¹⁵⁴ "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool." Isaiah 66:1

¹⁵⁵ Tragically, the disease that created so many of these orphans, yellow fever, returned in 1878 to result in many more.

[Key words: image vendors]

The Big Snow: 1877

All this time Peewit, in blissful ignorance of what had transpired below, had been gathering another snow mountain together, which he now launched over in time to bury an Italian image-vender with his load of wares, who chanced to be passing.

Two Irishman in a coal cart, who had witnessed the sad affair, stopped and dug him out with their shovels, but it was two hours before he ceased gesticulating and rooting around in the snow heap for his plaster of Paris mockingbirds and chalk dancing girls.

(*The Highland Weekly News*, March 22nd, 1877) (Hillsborough Ohio)

[Key words: Italian; image vender; humour; plaster of Paris; mockingbirds; dancing girls]

Intemperate habits: 1877

Louisa Ward was charged with assaulting Joseph Ward on June 16. Mr. Bonnin appeared for complainant, who stated that he went to his house, in Adelaide, to remove the furniture, found the door barricaded and his wife smashing the furniture with an axe. He got in, and she hit him with a chimney ornament. She had threatened and struck him on several occasions during the four years of their married life. It was her intemperate habits that caused the trouble. Defendant said she wanted maintenance for herself and child, and did not wish to return to her husband. Sent to gaol for one month with hard labour.

(*South Australian Register* June 23rd 1877)

[Key words: mantelpiece; ornament; violence]

Winter clothes: 1877

A plaster of Paris image man is in town and all the married men in Burlington wear their winter clothes and ulster overcoats to the store, and go to bed in them at night. It's the only safe plan.

(*Cambridge Chronicle*, October 13, 1877) (MA)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; image man; clothing exchange; humour]

Hiding: 1877

On the arrival of the Wotonga, from Sydney, early this morning, the Custom House officers made a seizure of a quantity of jewellery from one of the passengers. It was concealed in a plaster of paris figure. The value of the property is worth about £900.

(*The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 12th 1877)

With reference to the alleged attempt to smuggle jewellery into the colony by the steamer Wotonga, which arrived from Sydney on Monday night, an inquiry was on Wednesday held by the officers of the Customs department. The jewellery seized is the property of Mr. Cattanach, a manufacturing jeweller of this city, and his explanation was to the effect that a Mr. Hogarth received an order for jewellery from Sydney some time ago. He

applied to Mr. Cattnach to supply the order, and this was done, but there was only time to ship the goods, and not to enter them outwards. Mr. Hogarth, in Sydney, could only dispose of a portion of the goods, and by telegram asked if he should return the balance. A reply in the affirmative was sent, and the goods were sent by Mr. Hogarth, concealed in the plaster of Paris figure of the Queen. Mr. Cattnach denies all intention to defraud the revenue, and shifts the blame of sending the jewellery concealed to the shoulders of Mr. Hogarth, who, he thinks, was guilty of a simple indiscretion.

(*The Mercury* December 18th, 1877) (Hobart)
[Key words: plaster of Paris; figure; concealment]

Columbus' nose: 1877

Let us give thanks! That Italian image man fell down on Perry Street last night and smashed his wares to pieces. Chris. Columbus collided with Minerva and lost a nose, while Minerva sustained a fracture of the ear. George Washington kicked an ear off Charlie Dickens, and the bull pup fell on Dan Webster, and it is safe to say that Daniel feels "all broke up now." – Toledo Blade.

(*The Worthington Advance*, April 12th 1877)
[Key words: Italian; image man; destruction; Columbus; Minerva; Washington; Dickens; Webster; bulldog]

A foreigner on the street: 1877

Eliza Lamb, a woman of loose character, who lives in Steelhouse lane, was charged with having stolen £3 from the person of Bernardo Bernardi, an image vender, who at present lives in Silver street. Prosecutor is an Italian, and on Monday, according to his statement, he found it very hot. He had some beer, and towards evening he began to drink spirits. He became drunk, and was then picked up by several loose women, for whom he paid for liquor. They got him outside, and one of the women took £3 from him.– The case was not clearly made out against the prisoner, but it was proved that she bore a bad character, and, as a suspected person, she was committed to Wakefield for one month with hard labour.

(*The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, June 22nd 1877)
[Key words: image vendor; crime]

Assault: 1878

John Fryer, a groom, of this city, was fined 17s 6d, including costs, for assaulting Giovanni Alberti, an Italian image vender, of Birmingham, on 21st ultimo.

(*Berrow's Worcester Journal*, January 5th 1878)
[Key words: Italian; image vendor; crime]

Demolition: 1878

Wm. H. Travers, an awning and tent maker on Sycamore Street, got drunk last night and demolished a dozen or more plaster paris images belonging to an itinerant vendor. He was made to pay the damages and \$3 fine this morning.

(*The Cincinnati Daily Star*, June 29th 1878)

[Key words: violence; crime; plaster of Paris; images; itinerant vendor]

Motes: 1878

Next Monday night the “old men’s debating society” will discuss the question. “Are motes more destructive of winter clothing than plaster of Paris image peddlers?”

(*Ashtabula Telegraph*, December 6th 1878)

[Key words: clothing exchange; humour; plaster of Paris; image peddlers]

Liberian houses: 1878

...Nearly all of the dwellings in Liberia, outside of Monrovia, are furnished plainly— very much in the style prevalent amongst colored folks in America. There were the familiar plaster of Paris images, dogs and cats on the mantels, the familiar gaudily gilded and painted china cups and mugs, and the familiar ghastly caricatures of Scriptural scenes... I could easily imagine myself in the best room of a respectable colored family down south...

(*The Anderson Intelligencer*, August 22nd, 1878) (SC)

[Key words: taste; plaster of Paris; dogs; cats; mantelpiece]

A good fella: 1878

A Boston correspondent writes us this : An Italian image vendor came to our office today, and, among other things, offered for sale a plaster cast of Shakspeare, which he held up in his hand to attract attention. One of the clerks asked him, in fun, if it was Christopher Columbus. “Oh no,” said the Italian, “it is not Columbus; “it is Shakspeare; *he wass good feller!*” — rising inflection on the last syllable.

(*Southern Argus* March 7th, 1878)(South Australia)

[Key words: Italian; image vendor; Shakespeare; Columbus; accent]

Goose bone: 1879

The signal service men predict that the rest of the winter will be severely cold. If Uncle Strod. Renick’s goose bone agrees with them, we will believe it and prepare to take the consequence.¹⁵⁶ If not, we shall not yet raise a row with our wife because she traded our overcoat for a plaster-paris image, sometime last summer. We want it distictly understood that we are a goose bone man.

(*Lexington Weekly Intelligencer*, December 13th, 1879)

[Key words: clothing exchange; plaster of Paris; image]

Hoaxing a policeman: 1879

An amusing incident took place not long ago at Arrad Foot, near Ulverston. Some wag, or wags, had removed certain plaster of Paris

¹⁵⁶ The colour of the dried breastbone of a Thanksgiving goose was believed to predict the severity of the coming winter.

images out of a gentleman's garden into the middle of the road, and one of their number went back to fetch the policeman, on the pretence that a man was lying in the road with his throat cut. Off posted his highness the "bobby," but on coming to the top of the hill, which gave him a full view of the road, he perceived something white that terrified him so much as to send him off towards Ulverston for help. Speedily he returned with a couple of policeman, and after they made a circuitous road through some fields they came upon the object of their commiseration. Imagine their disgust when they found that their efforts were only to be rewarded by finding a plaster of Paris image. A hearty burst of boisterous merriment behind the "dyke" soon convinced them that they had been duped, and after a few threats of vengeance they departed.

(*Whitehaven News*, October 30th 1879)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; mischief]

Missionary of Art: 1880

An eloquent and famous American preacher once said, in an address upon the Fine Arts, that he never could see an Italian image vendor enter a poor man's cabin without feeling that he ought to lift his hat to him as to a real missionary of Art. For, rude and coarse as might be the images he carried, they still embodied at least a rudimentary idea of sculpture, and that lay latent in the mind of the poor man's son. This was a great truth that the preacher uttered, and recalls the old familiar proverb, "Despise not the day of small things."

(*The Theosophist*, Vol. I, No. 6, March, 1880, p. 163)

[Key words: Italian; image vendor; art; education]

To go west: 1880

For a poor man to go West means to economise, to abstain, suffer, toil, to wear clothes which here would be exchanged for plaster of Paris images, to live without society, and endure what none seemed willing to do here.

(*The Canton Advocate*, October 14th 1880) (Maryland)

[Key words: old clothes; plaster of Paris; images]

Christmas harvest: 1880

On Christmas morning the plaster-of-paris image man finds his harvest. The tailor has sewed, and the plaster-of-paris man comes around to reap. At least it seems sew. Your husband, if you are a married woman, probably has a warm Ulster with fish-horn buttons on the back.¹⁵⁷ You are aware that a broomstick is one of the most warming things in the world, and your aesthetic tastes argue what's the use of an Ulster to him? You therefore, make a trade. You get a plaster-of-paris cat in seven colours, and make home beautiful, even if the head of the family does tear his hair.

(*The Highland Weekly News*, December 23rd 1880)(OH)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; clothing exchange; cat; colour]

¹⁵⁷ An Ulster was a long casual overcoat; "fish-horn buttons" were presumably buttons made from horn, with a "fish eye" in the centre.

Images in Burbank: 1880

Four Italians are making plaster of Paris images at Burbank, which they intend to peddle through the territory.

(*The Canton Advocate*, October 14th 1880) (SD)

[Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images]

Fiends: 1881

The plaster Paris image fiends infest this community.

(*Towanda Daily Review*, November 17th 1881)(PA)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; nuisance]

From The Forger's Fate: 1881

The wanderer looked up; a young man of one or two-and-twenty had come out of the inn, and stood near under the shade of the tree, having placed a large image-box that he carried by his side. His eyes were fixed on the wanderer, and he half smiled as he met the stranger's steady look.

'What has brought you from Parma?' said the wanderer.

'What takes many from home, signor,' he replied; 'seeking my bread.'

[...]

'Are you going from here into France ?' he asked.

He had spoken before in the Tuscan dialect, it was the Parmese dialect he used now, and the image-seller's eyes lighted up as he replied, 'Yes, I have been in France before. I am going back there now.'

'And you come from Parma!' said the wanderer.

'Yes,' replied the Parmese.

The wanderer glanced at the speaker. He wore the usual peasant's dress; gaiters lashed with red cords, a grey flat-crowned felt hat, adorned with tassels and a peacock's feather, red sash, and jacket of dark brown cloth.

(*Evening News* August 25th, 1881)

[Key words: image box; Italy; Parma]

Cruel treatment: 1881

There is an old Italian *padrone* in Bradford who has a number of small boys under his control, brought from Italy, and who sell plaster-of-Paris images for their task-master. These boys are very scantily clothed, poorly fed and receive the most cruel treatment if they fail to fulfil the labor imposed on them.

(*Centre Democrat*, August 4th 1881) (PA)

[Key words: Italian; padrone; boys; plaster of Paris; images; abuse]

Aesthetic longings: 1881

The husband of the woman whose esthetic longings go out in the direction of plaster Paris [sic] images has not been seen on the streets since the severe weather has rendered it necessary to wear winter clothing.

(*The Emporia News*, January 14th 1881) (Kansas)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; clothing exchange]

Second best suit: 1881

Before a woman trades off her husband's second-best suit for a seven cent plaster image, she should feel in the pockets for the letters she gave him to post last winter.

(*Taranaki Herald*, July 29th 1881) (NZ)

[Key words: plaster; image; cost; clothing exchange; humour]

Bitten: 1881

At Clerkenwell police Court, London, on Tuesday, an Italian image vendor was committed for trial on a charge of disfiguring a man for life by biting off a piece of his nose. The prisoner's stucco figures, it appears, were broken by some lads, and the prosecutor, who was passing at the time, was knocked down and bitten by the Italian.

(*Birmingham Daily Post* January 27th 1881)

[Key words: Italian; image vendor; crime; violence]

Cartoon: 1881

The Duke of Argyll's resignation has given rise to some very clever cartoons. One of these represents the Premier as a stucco-image vendor who has just made an awkward stumble over an obstacle on the ground labelled "Land Bill." The result is that Argyll has fallen of the board upon his head, the Home Secretary is lying on his back and threatening to roll off, while Lords Kimberly and Spencer are nodding forward ominously. The members from Birmingham, indeed, are the only ones remaining fast and firm.

(*The Derby Mercury*, April 27th 1881)

[Key words: stucco; image vendor; humour]

Fire: 1882

Nelson, this day.

A six-roomed house in Brook-street, Valley, occupied by Mr. Pusch, was destroyed by fire today. Considerable difficulty was experiencing in rescuing his wife, who is an invalid. The house belonged to Mr Cullen, of Picton, and was insured in the Liverpool, London, and Globe for £100. Mr Pusch, who is a maker of plaster of Paris images, had his furniture and models insured in the New Zealand office for £400, and his stock of images for £250.

(*Interprovincial News*, January 6th, 1882) (NZ)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images]

He wasn't a count: 1882**[Oddities of Kissing]**

An Italian image peddler was sent to prison for kissing a Cleveland woman. Wonder how she found out after the kissing that he wasn't a count?—|Philadelphia News.

(*The Columbian*, November 24th, 1882)

[Key words: Italian; image peddler; humour]

Chamber of horrors: 1882

...I hear a gentle tap at the door. I open it to confront a blandly smiling Italian image vendor.

“I wants to see ze mistress of ze house.”

“We don’t want anything today,” say I.

“But I wants to see *ze mistress of ze house*,” with a look of profound contempt at me.

“Well, she don’t want to see you,” retort I, utterly exasperated, as I slam the door in the face of the son of the sunny South, leaving him to take himself to the woman next door, who has a perfect chamber of horrors in a collection of scriptural and historical personages in plaster, ranging from a praying Samuel whose legs, owing to an entirely original conception of the artist, seem to terminate at the knee, to an “eyestrian state” as she calls it, of George Washington, who seems to have gotten on horseback with great difficulty, and to be in a very doubtful state as to what he is to do there, and how he is ever to get off.

(*Willamette Farmer*, June 30th 1882) (OR)

[Key words: Italian; image vendor; taste; Samuel; Washington; humour]

Madame Vestris’ foot: 1882

40 years ago England had another Mrs Langtry – Madame Vestris. She was as lovely as she was liberal and as attractive as she was accessible. She was the daughter of F. Bartolozzi, a royal academician, and just a little over the average height, of full and voluptuous figure, with a foot the symmetry of which was said to be unparalleled. It had been sculpted and plaster casts were on sale by Italian image boys in the streets. Her stage shoes, after being once worn, were bought at fabulous prices and used as drinking vessels by “bloods” of the time. Who M. Vestris was, nobody seemed to know or care. The unstamped press used to describe him as a bibulous loafer, who dodged about stage doors at treasury times, and levied tell on madame’s salary.

(*Lancaster Daily Intelligencer*, December 11th 1882)
(Pennsylvania)

[Key words: Madame Vestris; foot; plaster casts]

A likeness in plaster: 1882

I occasionally employed a little black-eyed black-haired and dark-skinned Italian as a *formatore* in plaster work, who had related to me a short time before that himself and a comrade image-vender were ‘doing’ Switzerland by hawking their images. One day a Swiss gentleman asked him if he could make his likeness in plaster. “O, yes, signor; I am a sculptor.” So Matteo Mattei—such was the name of the pretender—got some plaster, laid the big Swiss gentleman on his back, stuck a quill in each nostril for him to breathe through, and requested him to close his eyes. Then ‘Mat,’ as I called him, poured the soft plaster all over his face and forehead; then he paused for reflection; as the plaster was beginning to set he became frightened, as he had never before undertaken such a job, and had neglected to prepare the face properly, especially the gentleman’s huge beard, mustache, and the hair about the temples and forehead, through

which, of course, the plaster run and become solid. ‘Mat’ made an excuse to go outside the door; ‘then,’ said he, I run like—.’

(*The Daily Cairo Bulletin*, January 21st 1882) (Illinois)

[Key words: Italian; plaster; Switzerland; images; humour]

A luv of a Bishop:

“Faith, an he’s a luv of a Bishop, pace be to his sowl!” I turned to see whence this benediction came, and saw an image vendor laden with his wares presenting the image of a bishop to the Bridget you see in the picture. Cute fellows are these image venders. They study your eyes while you study their handiwork.

(*The Great Empire City* 1883, 29)

[Key words: image; bishop; selling]

Personal and business injuries: 1883

An Italian image vendor in the United States Court has secured judgement against certain citizens of Douglassville to the amount of \$1,250 for personal and business injuries sustained. This entire amount was paid by Col. J. V. Edge, Ordinary of Douglass county he being the only one able to pay the judgement.

(*Advertiser and Appeal*, Brunswick GA , June 2nd 1883)

[Key words: Italian, image, vendor, crime, violence]

Emperor William: 1883

Emperor William is said to have a very extensive wardrobe, some of the articles having been in his possession and use for twenty-five years. The Emperor’s wife is very different from other women, or else plaster of Paris image vendors never call with busts of Napoleon and Bismarck, which they offer to exchange for second-hand clothing.

(*The Canton Advocate*, November 8th 1883)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; image vendors; Napoleon; Bismark; clothing exchange]

A New Italian Industry: 1883

“Yes—a bizz-a-ness is-a good-a now, not so good as a-spring-a, but pret-a good,” said a plaster image manufacturer in classic Tinpot to a Commercial Gazette reporter, Saturday afternoon. His business is to turn out plaster images of all kinds, from a building to a head of Minerva, and from the pure white plaster of Paris through all the shades of impossible bronzes to the pink hued tint of the mixture of plaster, marble dust, acid and whatnot. There are four of these manufacturers in the city, and they supply the hundred peddlers with their wares. The molds are all of Eastern make. They are made of zinc, in two or three pieces, according to the work, and so accurately formed that with care no traces of the joints can be seen in the cast. Making the images is quick and inexpensive work. The plaster is mixed to the consistency of thick cream, the mold set up and the liquid mass run in. In some of the firms air is used to force the plaster well into the mold; in a few a flat shapes a plunger is brought into play as in making pressed glassware, and others are run solid. The molds vary in price from \$1-\$10 dollar according to the work on them and the number of

pieces. When the market is been glutted with any one shape, the mold is sent back East to be sold in another locality, so that they are not expensive in the long run. As there are but two profits— the manufacturer’s and the peddler’s – it is easily see why so many of Italy’s sons go into the business. It leaves the organ and the monkey away out of sight and gives the peanut stand a hot race with the chances about even.—Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette

(*Arizona Weekly Citizen*, August 4th 1883)

[Key words: plaster; image; building; Minerva; bronze; manufacture; techniques; costs; Italian]

Plaster in Paris (Kentucky): 1883

Paris can now boast of having one manufacturing establishment. An Italian is manufacturing plaster of Paris images on upper Main street.

(*The Bourbon News*, February 27th, 1883) (Kentucky)

[Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images]

What a woman likes: 1883

... to trade old clothes for China vases and plaster of Paris images.

(*The Morristown Gazette*, September 5th 1883) (Tennessee)

[Key words: old clothes; plaster of Paris; China vases; images]

Italian Images: 1883

The Manner in Which the Dark-Eyed Sculptors Work and Live.

“Buy my images?” The speaker, a slender, knob nosed, dark-eyed youth, stood on the corner of Seventh and Chestnut streets and piped his plaintive melody in sixty-four different keys.¹⁵⁸ He was a ragged Italian, redolent of garlic and macaroni. He wore a dusty slouch hat, and his toes peeped out into the soft sunlight in a suggestive sort of way. There was about him the look of chronic hunger. His voice ran up the gamut and down the gamut, first harsh and decisive, anon soft and supplicating, like that of a woman, alternately loud, low, cracked and round-toned. Rich people and poor people, policeman, bootblacks, and dogs of all degrees, with muzzles and without muzzles, passed him without turning their heads. Still the pedler kept crying his disjointed images, until at last a press reporter, with his heart full of commiseration in his pocketful of five cent pieces, tapped him on the shoulder and said:

“How much?”

“A dollar and a quarter,” replied the Italian.

“Too much; I give twenty-five cents.”

“Basta! one dollar.”

“Twenty-five cents?”

“I take fifty.”

“Twenty-five?”

“Take him along.”

And the reporter lifted the plaster of Paris image of a female diver, from the nomad’s willow basket and laid it tenderly across his arm as if it were a

¹⁵⁸ “Seventh and Chestnut streets” = Central Philadelphia.

baby. The image was tolerably well moulded, is made of genuine plaster of Paris, and is a counterpart of those sold in the retail stores for one dollar.

The marvel is how the beggars can sell them so cheaply, and yet keep from starving. Every trade has its secrets, and that of image-making is no exception to the rule. To begin with the Italian plaster sculptors live upon almost nothing. Six men will occupy two small rooms. In the other room is their workshop. For dinner they have a bowl of soup the principle ingredients of which are bones, scraps of meat, a few slender wisps of macaroni, and pepper and salt in profusion. Two huge slices of bread and a butcher knife complete the meal. The men eat and work, and work and smoke. They buy the cheapest sort of plaster of Paris for one dollar a barrel. A barrel of plaster will make 500 images. The moulds are made of gelatine, which costs \$1 per pound. An ordinary mould costs \$2. Each mould is made to produce not less than fifty images. An industrious maker can turn out, every day, 100 images. By calculation upon this basis appears that the images cost about ten cents each, not including time, of which however, the wily Italian makes no reckoning. This is the whole secret. The retail dealer says that the image cannot be made from less than forty cents. So they cannot when first class materials are employed. The American manufacturers of images employ a skilled laborer to scrape off the mould marks and tone up the anatomy. This counts. So does the time consumed in the moulding. The gelatine costs twice as much as that used by the Italians. The moulds are not made to produce over a dozen images. Here is another big saving for the macaroni-eater. The latter seldom lives long in one place. He and his countrymen travel in droves of six and a dozen. They move from city to city, making their images. They sell one subject "into the ground" as the retailers say, and then make a vast quantity of another. Just now every Italian image maker in Philadelphia are making female divers. In a few weeks they will be making something else. That are and have a sharp eye to business. They find that a certain image catches the popular whim. Forthwith they make nothing else. Thousands of the favourite images go bobbing up and down Chestnut Street. The houses are full of them. And so it goes. The business of image making is declining. In former years the pedlers over-ran the country. Now they seldom go into rural districts. In the winter they make images. In the spring they divide their time between selling their wares and collecting cigar stumps. In the summer they deal in ice cream and figs and cheap fruit. When they die they are buried in the Potter's field, and that is the last of them. The images are cast in the ash barrel and that is the last of them.— *Philadelphia Press*.

(*Millheim Journal*, July 26th 1883)

[Key words: Italian; images; diver'; manufacture; techniques; selling; decline]

Bric-a-brac: 1883

We were sitting by the fire,
 And the tender twilight gloom
 Made a picturesque interior
 Of the "friezed" and "dadoed" room:
 For my fair Elsie was cultured
 In the most aesthetic style—
 She grew wild upon her patters,
 And quite raved upon a "tile."

She could carve a dainty bracket,
She could paint a silken screen;
She could broider birds and beetles
Such as eye had never seen.
She had decorated beer-jugs
In the highest style of art,
And her bric-a-brac collection
Was the treasure of her heart.

But I loved her—ah, I loved her,
As she sat beside me there,
With a comb of antique silver
Looping back her golden hair!
How I loved that sweet face, hidden
By the hideous painted fan,
On which sprawled such fearful monsters
As hail only from Japan!

The flame leaped up and flickered—
Was its glow upon her cheek?
Or did tender, changing blushes
Tell my coward heart to speak?
One white, dainty hand was fluttering,
Like a snow-bird on her knee.
Ah, sweet trembler, was it waiting
To be caught and pressed by me?

I must speak now--now or never!
Perish all my doubts and fears.
I must speak! Hope's sudden sunburst
Seemed to flush the coming years
I must speak—the spell was broken!
Fierce, impassioned, fearless, rash,
I fell on my knees before her—
Fell with—horrors! what a crash!

Such a crash, it echoed round me
Like the final crack of doom!
For her eyes' volcanic fires
Seemed to light the shadowed room.
I had toppled o'er a table,
Full of strange Pompeian-ware,
And I caught my hat and vanished—
How, I didn't know or care.

'Twas my last, my farewell visit
To that charmer of my heart;
I discreetly left my goddess
To the worship of her art.
She was married to old Golding,
On a pleasant day last week.
He is flabby, fat, and sixty—
So a valuable antique.

(*South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, December 5th 1883)
 (Victoria, Australia)
 [Key words: bric-a-brac; humour]

An escaped lunatic: 1883

Ma tried to reason with him, but he was awful worked up and said he was no old charity hospital, and he stormed around to find his old suit of clothes but ma had sold them to a plaster Paris image peddler, and pa hadn't anything to wear, and he wanted ma to go out in the alley and pick up the suit he had thrown from the window, but a rag man had picked them up and was going away, and pa grabbed a linen duster and put it on and went out after the rag picker, and he ran and pa after him, and the rag man told the policeman there was an escaped lunatic from the asylum, and he was chasing people all over the city...

(Peck 1883, 24)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; image peddler; clothing exchange]

Senseless popularity: 1884

A manufacturer of plaster of Paris images in Philadelphia, says that busts of Garfield have been so popular that the firm in Germantown has decided upon a large supply of soap busts to place in drugstore windows. There are instances in which popularity become senseless.

(*The Dallas Daily Herald*, July 26th 1884)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; Garfield]

Plaster Images: 1884

The Venders, and Where They Get Their Stock

"Imachees, imachees, only seventy-five-a-cent!" cried a little, swarthy, half-clad Italian, as he passed along the street yesterday. His stock in trade was in wooden tray. This rested easily on the top of his head, balanced as only a foreigner can balance a weight on his top-knot. In the tray were some thirty plaster-of-Paris figures. They were in rows of six each. The first row was of cats, setting on their haunches; each feline had a queer expression in its eyes, as if it was tired of continually nid-nodding at the multitude. Then came a row of mild looking bull dogs; next some rabbits, succeeded by half a dozen busts of Mercury, and at last six statuettes of Venus—the last two mentioned been "done" in bronze.

"Business good, John?" asked a reporter of the vendor.

"No; very bad-a," was the reply. "Sell-a more-a Christmas. All-a busy ina dashop."

"In the shop? Where is that?"

"Wess side. Seven-a men make a de imachees." And securing the number a visit was made to the shop. It consisted of two rooms, and it were the "sculptors." The place visted was one in which the better class of plaster-of-Paris images were made, the cats, dogs etc being "executed" by a lower grade of "artists." In one room were several barrels of the plaster; in the next a quantity of dusty statues and an immense amount of litter and clean—or white—dirt, reminding the visitor of his back kitchen after the kalsominers had cleaned it for the spring.¹⁵⁹ While statues were there in

¹⁵⁹ Kalsomine was a trade name for a whitewash (calcimine).

plenty, no modern Phidias was carrying out human-like figures from blocks of stone.¹⁶⁰ Instead the workmen were fashioning the Joves, the Ganymedes, the Apollos, and other mythological personages with moulds. Others were putting on the finishing touches of paint and bronze, the latter being burned on. It was learned that there are about seven establishments of this kind in the city, all doing a rushing business. This is the season when the stock is made for the fall and holiday trade, and the artists have their hands full. All of the workshops are run on the co-operative plan, the three to seven men working on shares, and selling their joint stocks to the vendors. A good workman will make about forty bronzed figures in a day, and they all are able to earn first-rate wages at the business. It seems, however, that they are all native Italians, learning the trade before coming to this country, and the men who engage in it of the superior class. The best sort of images are made in gelatine moulds, for these can be cut cleaner, giving the outlines of the features better; the second grade are fashioned in moulds of white metal, while the poorer class are made in plaster moulds. The whole industry in the city supplies a large number of men with work, both as makers and sellers, while the effect in beautifying homes, though it may be in a minor degree, is not without its value.—
Chicago News

(*The Salt Lake Herald*, July 19th 1884)

[Key words: images; cats; noddies; dogs; rabbits; Mercury; Venus; bronzed; manufacture; techniques; plaster; Jove; Ganymede; Apollo; colours; numbers; Italians]

Broken wares: 1884

Joseph Forrey ran against an Italian image vender on South Queen street this afternoon, and broke his wares. He was held for a hearing by Alderman Donnelly.

(*Lancaster Daily Intelligencer*, September 27th 1884)
(Pennsylvania)

[Key words: Italian; image vender; violence]

A model for modern times: 1884

Pause before Venus de Medici with no vulgar gaze, but with admiration at so true a conception of the goddess of love and beauty and such a model for modern times. Of course the originals are perfect, but they are beyond our reach; it would be sufficient however for us if the works of 'Phidias' were correctly modelled from the originals, and no matter where obtained whether from a statuary in the New Road, London, or from an Italian image boy in the streets.

(*The West Australian* October 30th 1884)

[Key words: Venus de Medici; Italian; image boy]

Piccolino: 1884

PICCOLINO. An Italian image seller. Waistcoat of scarlet cloth fastened round the waist with a sash of brown silk. Green plush knee breeches. Drab cloth gaiters. Sugarloaf hat trimmed with wild flowers. Board of images on the shoulder, the jacket slung at the back.

¹⁶⁰ Phidias (c480-430BC): Greek sculptor and painter best known for his statue of Zeus at Olympia.

(Anon 1884, 69)

[Key words: Italian; image seller; costume; images]

Short legs: 1884

I remember.
 With it he sent me something of his making,--
 A Mercury, with long body and short legs,
 As if by any possibility
 A messenger of the gods could have short legs.
 It was no more like Mercury than you are,
 But rather like those little plaster figures
 That peddlers hawk about the villages
 As images of saints.

(Longfellow 1884, 165)

[Key words: Mercury; plaster; figures; peddlers; saints]

Outlandish parrots: 1884

Well, there was a big outlandish parrot on each side of the clock, made out of something like chalk, and painted up gaudy. By one of the parrots was a cat made of crockery, and a crockery dog by the other; and when you pressed down on them they squeaked, but didn't open their mouths nor look different nor interested. They squeaked through underneath. There was a couple of big wild-turkey-wing fans spread out behind those things. On the table in the middle of the room was a kind of a lovely crockery basket that had apples and oranges and peaches and grapes piled up in it, which was much redder and yellower and prettier than real ones is, but they warn't real because you could see where pieces had got chipped off and showed the white chalk, or whatever it was, underneath.

(Twain 1884)

[Key words: parrot; cat; dog; fruit basket]

The Italian Image-Maker: 1885

(Philadelphia Times)

"I maka a plastair figure in winter, sella dem in street in country in spring and sommer," said Guiseppe Antonelli, looking up from his work in a third-story room in a tenement house. "I maka only leeta figures; no can sella larcha ones—to heavy. Leeta ones put in basket, on tray, carry easy. Make all myself."

"Do you make some models yourself?"

"Model? Oh for models. No I buy de figura and maka de cass from figura. Image in plaster just so good as clay model— all same; not quite so fine; but I can make a phone with life. Ze mold in many pieces—every pieca differen'; one pieca for face, 'noder for handa, 'noder for drap. See?"

"What are the favourite figures?"

"Differen' time differen' figura. Some time sella lot, some time not at all. One time maka figura lade going to dive; not can maka enough. Zen people get tired, not can sella zem. Differen' heads, busts, zey sella all time. Venus, Clytie, Proserpina, good; maka zem always. Angels, head of Christ, Sanata Madonna, all ze tima; sella zem everywhere. Zen maka bracket for place vasa; always sell bracket if preety.

“We don’t send out any canvassers from here,” said Luccarini, the figure molder. “Our trade is a custom one. We make no models, we buy them. We only make the plaster casts and molds. When I came to this country, more than thirty years ago, there were very few Italians over here and very few people in this business. The men who sell casts images and figures on the streets generally make them themselves or act as agents for a man who makes them. There are now quite a number of these plaster-cast makers in Philadelphia, it is a flourishing trade. Some of the work turned out is really good, but most of it is not well finished; it is too smooth. It is done quickly and often without proper tools.”

(*The Hazel Green Herald*, April 29th 1885) (Kentucky)

[Key words: Italian; accent; plaster; methods; Venus; Clytie; Proserpina; angels; Christ; Madonna]

Teach them a lesson: 1885

For the past eight or nine months an Italian has been seen on our streets pedalling plaster images of various designs. About a month ago two other Italians arrived in the city and commenced in the same line of business. They were evidently jealous of the established countrymen, and made it very unpleasant for him, finally assaulting him. The latter being an offence against the law, they will have to appear before Police Justice Bickerton, who will no doubt teach them a lesson.

(*The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, October 30th 1885)
(Honolulu)

[Key words: Italian; plaster images; competition; violence]

A smiling child’s face: 1885

Some years ago, when I first saw him, he had a number of small plaster busts of smiling child’s face. The workmanship was much better than the ordinary character of such articles, and the face was repeated with sufficient faithfulness on half a dozen busts to show that they were copies of some model.

“Are these likenesses of any child, or all mere fancy heads?” was asked of the image vender.

“Eet ees my little girl Tita,” said he, and he laughed and showed a set of wonderfully perfect teeth.

“Does it look like her?”

“Oh yees!” he exclaimed, with an earnest protest in his tone against the imputation that his art was faulty.

A few days ago I saw the same man, with a basketful of small casts his arm. Stopping him from idle curiosity, one of the heads was taken from the basket and examined. It was Tita again, just as it had been years ago – the same smiling happy face.

“You still copy your daughter’s face as it used to be?” said the writer.

The man look surprised, and then his face clouded.

“You told me once long ago that this was your little girl Tita, who face you modelled. “Has she not changed, and does she not look older?”

He took off his tattered hat, and his voice trembled as he answered,—

Tita ees dead, but I see zee face in zee clouds, Signor. She eez dead, and no changa.”

(*Indiana State Sentinel*, August 5th 1885)
 [Key words: plaster; busts; basket; sentimentality]

Onions are ripe: 1885

—It is only the woman who is given away in marriage. The man gives himself away before the honeymoon is over.—Ex.

He does, but it is a woman who gives his overcoat away for a plaster of Paris image, about the time onions are ripe.

(*The Sedalia Weekly Bazaar*, May 5th 1885)

[Key words: clothing exchange, plaster of Paris, image]

The overcoat: 1885

Whether it was wise, after all, to sell the overcoat last summer the plaster image that got broken so easily.

(*Staunton Spectator*, 25th November 1885)

[Key words: clothing exchange, plaster, image]

Shakespeare: 1885

PERHAPS the best known of all the portraits professing to represent Shakespeare is the Chandos. Certainly it is the most familiar to the large mass of people. The cheap plaster cast, hawked about the streets by the Italian image vender, is modelled after this portrait, while the handsome bronze that one puts over his clock has the same features.

(Norris 1885, 67)

[Key words: Shakespeare; plaster cast; Italian; image vender]

An abbreviated sacque: 1885

A rather good story is going the rounds on Louis Merriam, the good-looking policeman from France, while he was asleep yesterday morning. Officer Leyde sent an Italian image peddler up to his room and Louis was awakened from his dreams by the Dago's song. Jumping out of bed, the policeman grabbed the water pitcher and chased the frightened Italian down the hall. Clothed in an abbreviated sacque¹⁶¹, he flew after the retreating Dago and dumped the contents of the pitcher on his head. Louis laughed long and loudly at the half-drowned Italian, but when he "right about faced" to return to his room, three ladies who had been disturbed by the noise had stuck their uncombed heads through the doors of bedrooms and were sizing him up. When Louis saw them he dropped the pitcher, yelled and jumping down the stairs shouted to the women to get out of sight, they made him nervous. The females retired, pushed their bureaus against their doors and Louis sneaked into his room, put on his overcoat and jumped into bed.

(*St Paul Daily Globe*, October 19th 1885)

[Key words: Italian; image peddler; humour; racism; mischief]

¹⁶¹ At this time, a short jacket, usually worn by children, fastened at the neck.

Images not graven 1885

The Child of Italy Who Sells Them, With a Smutty Face, a Broken Dialect and a Smile.

A Visit to the Studio Where the Works of the Old Masters Are Reproduced.

Some Plaster of Paris, Salt and Water, With a Mould, the Only Tools Needed,

Favorite Figures in the Plaster—The father of His Country at a Premium.

A little dried up dago with a bronzed image in each hand and another hanging by a string around his neck, strolled into the capitol the other day and asked Gen. MacCarthy if he wanted to buy. While he was trying to dispose of his ware a GLOBE reporter stood by when the image vender turned to go, after an unsuccessful showing, he was asked where he got the images and how much he paid for them. He smiled a sort of half smile, half cynical grin and refused to answer the latter question, but said he had them made at the corner of Third and Commercial streets.

“You wanna learna make?” he asked when the reporter told him that he was coming down to see how they were made, and then in his broken English gave a very cordial invitation to visit his place and with his images in his hands and sickly, pleading smile on his somewhat dirty face glided out of the room and a minute later was holding up one of his images to some other official while he looked an interrogation point.¹⁶²

A day or two later a trip was made to the corner of Third and Commercial streets, where the man had said the images were turned out. It is in a little shop, hardly a foot higher than one’s head, with one small window to furnish light. Three men, looked about dried and baked as their countryman, the Roman soldier, said have been done to a crisp while on guard at Pompeii, were the occupants of the little room, and though they could not talk much English they indicated that a visitor would be no intruder.¹⁶³ In the faint light, and to an eye that was not too exacting on definitions, the little workshop was not unlike the working room of the American artists in Florence and other cities in that sunny land. There were models that in the dim light might have been St George killing the dragon, or an ordinary jockey ready for a two-mile running race, the main outline being a man and a horse. There were statues that might have been the Venus of Milo or the Goddess of Liberty; at any rate they were female figures, with about as many clothes on as the females wear at some variety theaters. There were a dozen or more curious-looking objects of a greenish colour and about the shape of a rough log, three or four feet long and a foot in diameter. These, it appeared, as the men went on with their work, WERE THE MOLDS in which these statues were carved, and which the three humble disciples of Praxiteles took apart and knocked around with the recklessness that would give a shock to an artistic eye.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² His posture resembled a question mark.

¹⁶³ “The Roman soldier” was a reference to a passage in *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1834) or Edward John Poynter’s (1865) painting *Faithful unto Death*.

¹⁶⁴ Praxiteles was “one of the most celebrated of the Attic sculptors” (ancientgreece.com)

“What are those moulds made of?” was asked of the only man whose English could be well understood.

“I dona know,” was the reply, as the artist went on this work without raising his eyes.

“What are the images made of?” was asked.

“We maka plaster ana salta.. Salta? You knowa him?” and the artist grinned again as he went on with his work.

“Salt?”

“Yesa salta.”

“What do you put salt in for?”

“Makastronga,” was the reply all in one word. Two of the the men then began taking apart one of the molds, which was in a half dozen or more pieces that fitted to each other like the pieces of a Chinese puzzle. They were first put together with a coating of varnish to cement them and prevent the plaster, water and salt from leaking out, and then bound round with a small rope to hold them firmly. A hole in one end allowed the plaster to be poured in, and then the whole was put away for a couple of hours while the plaster hardened. The images seemed to be made without the arms, which were run in separate molds and then stuck on. Another kind of mold, used for the more elaborate faces and for such pieces as had fine work, were made of glue that would bend like thick pieces of rubber. These were in several pieces, like the other kind, and were put together in about the same way.

It takes about two hours, the men said, for the plaster the harden, and then it takes a half hour more to trim and cover them with a varnish mixed with bronze, so that with a hunk of glue dug out in proper shape, a quantity of plaster of paris, a little salt and some ordinary water it is possible to turn out George Washingtons or Abraham Lincolns in about two one half hours per George or Abraham.

While the reporter was there another man, evidently the proprietor of the factory or studio, came in. He could talk English.

“What are those molds made of ?” was asked him. He looked rather curiously at his questioner and said:

“You liva in Santa Paula?”

“Yes.”

“You wanta learna maka?”

“No.”

“You wanta buya?”

“No.”

“I don’ta tell what theya make of. Thena youa know how. I knowa. I don’ta tell. I keepa secret.” And he grinned and looked at the other three men, who grimaced back. No amount of questioning would induce him to give up.

One of the men sat on a barrel polishing a two-foot-high George Washington with a piece of sand paper. The Proprietor said this had to be done before they were vanished and bronzed. The whole cost of a piece of that size would be about 50 cents.

“What can I do so most of?” asked the reporter.

“Georgawash, he sella, but nota much now. Mena have no money. Saya don’t wanta buy.”

“They don’t sell well?”

“Noa, too much cost. Pretty ladya sella some. Not much.”

As it was getting dark the three men gathered up two or three busts of Venus, a statue of the martyred Garfield, a couple of horses, a rabbit or

two, three statuettes of Abraham Lincoln and a dozen or so loose arms and hands, put them all in a box, put the box in a corner and locked their shop for the night.¹⁶⁵

(*St Paul Daily Globe*, November 29th 1885)

[Key words: racism; bronzed; image; image vender; manufacture; techniques; Washington; Venus; Garfield; horses; rabbits; Lincoln; humour]

Brittle distortions: 1885

It is a well-known fact that while immigration is almost unknown to the thriving peasantry of Tuscany, the neighbouring province of Lucca furnishes a very large proportion of the wandering Italians who go to seek their fortunes beyond the seas. These are nearly all *figurinaj*, the plaster image men who, with their trays of brittle distortions of famous statues, are to be met with in almost every part of the globe. Few peasant families of the Lucchese valleys are without some Gianni or Pietro, who, forsaking the parental corn- or hemp-patch, has trudged away to attack the world's oyster by means of sulphur-moulds and wax and plaster. But the Italian race being ever essentially home-loving, these Lucchesi seldom settle abroad. Sooner or later they find their way back to their native place, lay out their savings on a scrap of ground, tell wondrous tales of travel and golden possibilities, and keep up the family tradition by packing off all superfluous sons to seek their fortune in the same way"

(Villari 1885, 137-8)

A Cheap Peachbloom Vase: 1886

Shortly before the flowers began to bloom in the spring a Rockland woman heard a knock at the door, and when she opened it she encountered a peddler gentleman standing on the street and smiling blandly over a large basket of prehistoric plaster images.

"Matam," he said, smiling an inch or two wider, "I haf—"

"Don't want 'em," the woman snapped, beginning to shut the door.

The image man held up a vase temptingly, besplashed with much red and yellow paint.

"Haf you read of ter Shonny Morgan vase dot soldt for \$18,000 in New York?"¹⁶⁶ he asked, with his head on one side.

The woman slowly opened the door again and said she had.

The image man looked cautiously up and down the street and, sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper, said:

"I have here a vase dat ish a gombanion biece, only it is larger. So hellup me cracious, mine brudder shtole dis vase, and if you will not give me away, I sells it to you for \$2.50."

And she finally bought it for 35 cents and a last year's calico dress – *Rockland (Me) Courier*.

(*Democratic Northwest*, September 2nd 1886)

[Key words: plaster; images ; basket; humour; vase; clothing exchange]

¹⁶⁵ President Garfield, the 20th President of the US, was assassinated in 1881.

¹⁶⁶ A Chinese peach bloom glazed vase previously owned by Mrs Mary Morgan was bought by William T Walters for the then extraordinary price of \$18,000 in March 1886. It is likely that this humorous piece was invented in reaction to that notorious purchase, which inspired many an imitation, perhaps including the products of Italian image sellers.

Man as a Reformer: 1886

He wouldn't trade off old clothes for plaster-of-Paris images in bronze and other foolishness in bric-a-brac to hang on the walls.

(*Burlington Free Press*, June 26th 1886)

[Key words: clothing; plaster of Paris; images; bronze; bric-a-brac]

A fashionable craze: 1886

"What's them things made of?" asked an old lady of an Italian image vendor. "Plaster of Pares, madam. Vera beautiful." "I've heerd a good deal lately 'bout this Pasture of Paris, an' I suppose it's all the go. I guess I'll take them two cupids for the settin' room."

(*Sausalito News*, March 25th 1886)

[Key words: Italian; image vendor; plaster of Paris; humour; cupid]

Injuring a figure: 1887

Thomas Crane, 27, tanner, was charged with maliciously injuring a plaster of Paris figure, valued at 5s 6d, the property of Dangelo Rosario. He was fined, at the Central. 20s.

(*Evening News*, September 13th 1887)(Sydney)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; figure; value; crime; violence]

An Italian Bulletin: 1887

Detroit free press.

The latest reports as to the cholera among the 500 Italian immigrants on an island in New York bay go to show that at least 400 of them will pull through to monkey with plaster of Paris images and hand-organs this winter.

(*St. Paul Daily Globe*, October 17th, 1887)

[Key words: Italians; immigration; plaster of Paris; images]

Works of art: 1887

An Italian with the deprecating bow and abbreviated knowledge of English, has been selling the town plaster images, brackets and ornaments in flesh colored composition. Some of the statuary for instance, while happy in conception, cannot be held beyond criticism as works of art

(*Jamestown Weekly Alert*, June 2nd 1887).

[Key words: Italian; plaster images; statuary; criticism]

A Tuscan's Misfortune: 1887

It is a stately Italian who stalks majestically down Washington Street with a two-decked board on his head, supported also upon his shoulders, which is covered with plaster-of-paris images of distinguished persons and of holy saints. To him comes a newsboy, with papers under arm and face expressive of mischief, and shouting:

“Record, sir?”

The Italian bends neither to the right nor to the left, but says;

“No-no-no! G’waya, you!”

But the news boy thrusts his paper still insinuatingly under the statuette man’s nose and repeats:

“Record, sir – one cent?”

“G’waya now, or I keeks you!”

The newsboy turns to go, but as he does so he deftly extends his foot before the Italian’s toe, who trips, staggers, and falls full length, his precious board full of statuettes crashing in a thousand pieces upon the sidewalk. Meanwhile the newsboy has disappeared up an alley.

It is a cruel loss to the image-vender. His entire stock in trade is gone in an instant. He obeys the impulsive instinct of his race, and, sitting down on the curbstone, gives way to a torrent of tears and lamentations.

There arrives upon the scene a tender-hearted gentlemen, buttoned up in a snug overcoat and wearing a glistening beaver. He takes in the situation.

“Did you lose them all?” Asks the tender-hearted gentleman.

“Every one gona smash,” sobs the Italian. “Me broka all up!”

“What did you have on board?”

What I have? Oh, I have one Grova Cleveland, one Gen’la Grant, tree Garibaldi, tree Pio Nono, four St. Joseph, five St. Peter, six Virgin Mary, all gona hella ’gedder.¹⁶⁷ – *Boston Record*

(*Mower County Transcript*, January 14th 1887) (Minnesota)

[Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images; celebrities; saints; trickery; humour; emotion; Cleveland; Grant; Pio Nono; St Joseph; St Peter; Virgin]

A Marketable Husband: 1887

In Siam a man who has sold himself at gambling, can compel his wife, if she has money, to redeem him, but he thereupon becomes her property and chattel. This is a very equitable arrangement. The wife, if she so desires can sell her husband off, along with his summer pah’ben, for a plaster of paris image of Bismark or a spotted dog.

(*The Butler Weekly Times*, July 13th 1887)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; image; Bismark; humour]

Servants rooms: 1888

The Italian image man bore upon his head figures he had moulded in clay and painted in bright colours. There was the Virgin child, the crucifix, the Madonna, St Peter’s church at Rome, the Capitol at Washington, Jenny

¹⁶⁷ “Pio Nono” = Pope Pius IX

Lind, Daniel Webster, roosters, rabbits, dogs, etc. These images generally adorn the mantels of the servants' rooms.¹⁶⁸

(*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 27th 1888)

[Key words: Italian; image man; colours; Virgin; crucifix; Madonna; St Peter's Church; Capitol; Jenny Lind; Daniel Webster; roosters; rabbits; dogs; mantelpiece; customers]

Vocabulary: 1888

A well-read man of fair ability is said to use from 6,000 to 7000 words; but when he discovers that his wife has exchanged his summer vest for a plaster-of-paris image of the late Emperor William he doesn't use more than six or ten, but he manages, on the spur of the moment, to hit upon the wormest [sic] words in his vocabulary.¹⁶⁹ – *Morristown Herald*.

(*The Ohio Democrat*, June 23rd 1888)

[Key words: Emperor William; clothing; plaster of Paris; image]

Dago Alley: 1888

And the people who live in Dago Alley, what of them? They are a vicious lot and claim the place as their own by right of pre-emption and graduation in crime and misfortune. Residence in the alley is the last jumping off place in the wretched run of a miserable existence. Negroes with razors and Italians as dark, with stilettos, lie about the open doorways and amuse themselves in sleep, or the harmless diversion of beating the miserable women who cling to them and seem to thrive on their blows; or, if perchance the claims of hunger demand food, with nothing in sight to steal, the negro sallies forth in search of chores and the Italian roams about with plaster images. One of the Italians was arrested on my visit to the alley – a swarthy, muscular man, with a red handkerchief about his forehead and brass pendants in his ears, and while fellow protested his innocence with much gesticulation at the station, a dirk a foot long was taken from him.

“Me good ceeteesen; me no anything bad; sell de nice poppy corn and de big banan.,” he said in response to the usual enquiry regarding his occupation.

“Then what yer doin’ with the great big cheese carver?” asked the jailer.

“Why use him to cut de big banan, see?” the fellow answered.

(*Omaha Daily Bee*, May 27th 1888)

[Key words: Italians; plaster; images; racism]

They will be sent back: 1888

A batch of five miserable looking half starved Italian lads were saved from a life of slavery by Collector Magone of New York, on Tuesday.¹⁷⁰ The boys, who gave their names as, Luigi Ghitardi, Sentani Cario, Spitaro Fabbri, Ermindo Fabbri and Bertolomero Fabbri, arrived in the steerage of the French steamship *La Normandie* and were landed at Castle Garden.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Daniel Webster (1782-1852). US nationalist conservative senator and lawyer.

¹⁶⁹ “Emperor William” = William I of Prussia (1797-1888)

¹⁷⁰ “Collector Magone” = Daniel Magone (1829-1904) who was appointed Collector of the Port of New York in 1886.

¹⁷¹ *La Normandie* was a steamship built 1882 at Barrow for Compagnie Générale Transatlantique; Castle Garden was the first US immigration centre.

There the fact that they were imported by a padrone to sell plaster of paris images was developed.¹⁷²

The elder of the five boys, whose ages range from 11 to 22 years, said that their parents had bound them to Sebastiano Ascamio, of Philadelphia, for thirty months. They were to receive \$3 a month and their board and lodging. Collector Magone, to whom the case was referred, promptly ordered their detention at Castle Garden until the emigrant commissioners could send them back to Italy.

(*Lancaster Daily Intelligencer*, September 13th 1888)
(Pennsylvania)

[Key words: Italian; boys; padrone; plaster of Paris; images; slavery; wages]

A good-looking woman: 1888

Last time the club met, we sketched the Venus of Milo, or rather a plaster image representing that lady, who is now dead. I have never been to Milo and consequently never saw the lady, or was shown the point where she lived. The statue that we have left behind affair is probably inaccurate, as it represents her as having no arms or hands. People who become exhausted abruptly at the shoulder and have no place to carry the pulse and no crazy bones to hit on the mantelpiece are hardly worth while making a statue for. Venus is a good-looking woman about the back hair, and means of locomotion, but a party with no arms would have made a much more pronounced success as a freak in a museum writing receipts for making cake with her toes then in a matter of statuary. Venus made a good model at the last meeting, and although unarmed and having nothing to defend herself about her person but the temperature of the room, did not appear at all nervous. I understand that this marble revised statue of Miss V. de Milo was found in the bottom of the deep excavation. If it were not Lent I might say that this is why she is called Venus of Mile-low, but I hasten to not do so.

(*Springfield Daily Republic*, March 10th 1888)

[Key words: Venus de Milo; humour]

Not so cheap as plaster images: 1888

In the window of a Broadway bric-a-brac store was displayed a handsome piece of bronze with a label on it bearing the simple inscription "170." There was a lull in business yesterday afternoon, and then the door opened slowly and a tall, rather poorly dressed old man came in. "I like that figger in the window," he said, judiciously, taking out his spectacles. "Yes it's a beautiful piece of bronze," replied the dealer courteously.

"I think I'll buy that," said the old man, thoughtfully.

"All right, sir," assented the dealer, concluding this must be a Croesus in shabby clothes.

"There's niche in my house over'n Hoboken and I think she'll just fit into," pursued the old man. "I see you've marked the price of at one dollar seventy. I suppose I can get a plaster image cheaper'n that, but I like this figger, and I'll give you a dollar fifty cash. What do you say?"

For a second the dealer was speechless and then he shouted: "Merciful heavens, old man, the price of that bronze is one hundred and

¹⁷² *Padrone* = master/employer, esp. of immigrants.

seventy dollars!” and then there was a silence, broken only by the rapid patter of the old man’s galoshes towards the door, and the gasps of a Broadway dealer in bric-a-brac.

(*New York Tribune*, February 19th, 1888)

[Key words: plaster image, prices, humour]

The Image Peddler: 1888

Right in the midst of an elbowing and jostling crowd walks the Italian image vender. On his head is a tray, crowded full of his fragile wares. How little it would take to destroy their equipoise and send them, crashing, to the pavement. But he pursues his way with perfect ease, and does not seem to fear such calamity. Neither you, nor I, could carry them thus for a dozen steps, even when there was no throb to disturb, without an accident. Any few years ago the image vendor confined himself to figures of saints, virgins, and kindred subjects, but now his wares include almost everything in animate nature. Some of them are really beautiful and artistic, and find their way into homes of culture. Very often the vender and the maker of these images is one and the same person. He molds them of plaster, but there is no little skill and genius required to dress them down and get the right shade of colouring. He does not confine his operations to the city, but makes his regular trips through the country, disposing of his merchandise in towns and villages. He does not talk when it is not necessary, but studies your eyes, and when he sees a little admiration, quietly presses you to buy. He is a cute businessman. When he is seeking sales among Protestants his tray is laden with deer, antelope and things of similar nature. When he is among those of his own faith to find customers his goods consist of bishops, saints and other personages dear to the Catholic heart. In the picture the image vender is presenting the figure of a bishop to Bridget, who is undoubtedly delighted with it. If he does not make a sale it will be because her supply of money is too small.

(*West Kansas World*, April 7th, 1888)

[Uses the same woodcut as *The Great Empire City*, 1883, see Appendix I, Figure A1.72]

[Key words: Italian; image vender; saints; Virgins; animals; colour; plaster; selling]

Ire: 1889

An Italian image vender, who had been hawking his wares about the city, was walking along Bleeker Street last evening. A huge basket contained his objects of high art, and across his shoulder hung suspended by string two pieces of especial value to himself and which he doubtless prized most highly. Just when a particularly hard part of the pavement was reached the string parted suddenly and the works of art lay in fragments at the feet of the sunburned offspring of Italy. The shout of the gamin aroused his ire, and it exhausted his entire vocabulary in two languages to do justice to the occasion.¹⁷³

(*The Utica Daily Observer*, April 17th 1889)

[Key words: Italian; image vender; basket; humour; expletives]

¹⁷³ “Gamin” = street urchin.

The Little Image Merchant: 1889

By Horatio Alger, Jr.¹⁷⁴

On a pleasant afternoon, early in September, two persons—a man and a boy—were trudging slowly along the main road running through and connecting the town of Chester with the adjacent village. They belong to the class not seldom seen in our country towns; namely venders of cheap plaster images, which, though coarse and rude, are not altogether unserviceable in developing a love of art among the people.

[...]

Both were coarsely dressed; but in spite of his attire, the boy's appearance was decidedly prepossessing as his companion's was the reverse. Each bore upon his head, arrayed on a board, a variety of plaster images.

"*Cospetto!*" muttered the man in a grumbling tone, "the afternoon is one-half gone, and you have sold nothing. You must stir yourself, boy, or you shall have no supper."

[...]

...I believe I must buy something, if only for your sake. What have you got?"

Here is the image of two boys fighting.'

"I won't take that; it would be setting a bad example to any boys who might see it. What is this?"

"That is the image of Napoleon Bonaparte."

"Do you know who Napoleon was?"

"He was a king, wasn't he?"

"He was the Emperor of the French. How much do you ask for it?"

"You may have it for two shillings."

"Here is half a dollar. You may keep that for yourself."

[...]

The image of Napoleon was handed to Bridget, who bore it off in triumph, and the Corsican Emperor in plaster still adorns the mantel of the kitchen, over which that lady holds sway.

(*The Wahpeton Times*, April 25 1889) (North Dakota)

[Key words: plaster; images; art; board; two boys fighting; Napoleon; cost; abuse; humour]

Something for Nothing: 1889

From the Philadelphia Record.

Philadelphia Dame—"See this elegant Parian marble statuette I got in exchange for your storm-overcoat which you won't need any more this winter, I don't suppose, and—"

Husband—"Greatsnakes! I paid \$25 for that overcoat."

"Yes, but this statuette is worth \$40. It came from the Vienna Exposition. The man said so."

"My, my! What fools women are! That's the new kind of plaster images an Italian is making around the corner for old clothes men. It's worth 10 cents"

"Mercy! Is that all?"

¹⁷⁴ Horatio Alger (1832-1899): prolific US author of "rags to riches" stories

“Yes, that’s all. If I hadn’t my life insured for \$50,000 you’d starve to death when I’m gone, and I shall have that insurance money fixed so you can’t get anything but the interest, so much each day. Well it’s time for me to go around to the [illegible] Hall to pay my promises.

(*Pittsburg Dispatch*, March 5th 1889)

[Key words: clothing exchange; humour; Italian: plaster; images; cost]

Girls who waste money: 1889

[The average servant girl] will trade five old dresses for a quarter’s worth of plaster of paris images and think she has made a big bargain... Those who often wonder how these same peddlers live forget the servant girls and their foolishness.

(*Pittsburg Dispatch*, April 21st 1889)

[Key words: clothing exchange; cost; plaster of Paris; humour]

Art in Plaster of Paris: 1889

What the Image Peddler Finds Most Profitable—His Experience in Busts of Politicians

The Italian image vender is here a surer harbinger of spring and jay or blue-birds. He must needs have a sure foot and a head like a rope-walker to carry upon it so large array of his fragile commodities in safety. He does not, as one might suppose, seek the byways and unfrequented places as fearing someone might run against and jostle him and in an instant bring wreck and ruin, but he takes the crowded streets, and is oftener seen in a pushing, struggling eddy of humanity at street corner than elsewhere.

There is from season to season a change in the variety of art demanded by the fickle populace. The higher colors of a few years ago are no longer au fait. Plaster of Paris fruit-pieces and parrots in the uncompromising cardinal colours green, red and yellow, have had their day, and the demand is for quiet tints and bronzes. On South Meridian Street, a few doors below the Union tracks, in an old frame building, a party of Italians are now busily at work supplying the public with the current demand in gypsum art. A handsome, black-eyed young fellow, who spoke fairly good English, answered the reporter’s questions. “We sell more Shakespeare and Milton busts than any other kind— always bronze— always by the pair. Figure pieces, to represent spring and summer, will sell, and the “Dancing Girl” is good. The boy and girl with an umbrella over them is a good selling piece.”

These specimens of plaster of Paris art are all really excellent, the patterns being made by artists. “Berlin Horses” as they are called in the trade, are good sellers. This plaster Pegasus is taken from statue in Berlin, celebrated for its fine proportions.¹⁷⁵ In the animal line the best sellers are pug dogs. These they make in several sizes, coloring them to a close resemblance to the natural animal. The pug is now in fashionable and the plaster counterpart in brisk demand, selling, according to size and ugliness, from 15 cents to 50 cents each. Busts sell at \$1 a pair and are cheap at the money.

¹⁷⁵ Possibly *Pegasus* by Hugo Hagan, 1869.

“Why don’t you make a bust of President Harrison and sell it?”¹⁷⁶

There would be money in that, suggested the reporter to one of the sons of Italy, who with a sharp knife, was relieving William Shakespeare of the creases left by the mold from which he had just been shucked.

“We tried Clev’lan’; he no sell,” was the answer given with a dubious shake of the head.¹⁷⁷

“But Harrison would sell,” persisted the reporter.

We tried-a Clev’lan,’” was again the reply. Evidently the Italian had had a sad experience in debasing art to the level of American politics and is not to be again beguiled from “the legitimate.”

(*The Indianapolis Journal*, March 17th 1889)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; fruit; parrots; bronzed; Milton; Spring and Summer; Dancing Girl; boy and girl with umbrella; Berlin Horse; Pegasus; cost; pug dog; Harrison; accent; Shakespeare: Cleveland]

Brilliantly coloured: 1889

There was a tiny book-shelf, a few cheap pictures scattered about, and a bracket in one corner holding a brilliantly colored plaster of paris image. “The fruits of Dan’el’s industry,” Mrs Briggs was wont to say with pardonable pride.¹⁷⁸

(*Phillipsburg Herald*, August 2nd, 1889)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; image; colours]

Signs of coming Christmas: 1890

Venders of plaster paris images, paper flowers and other knickknacks moved along the street apparently meeting with an encouraging amount of trade...

(*The Indianapolis Journal*, December 21st 1890)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images]

Boys at Two Dollars Each: 1890

Children must be cheap in Italy. The authorities were recently notified that the parents of five little boys had sold their offspring for a bottle of olive oil and \$2 apiece. The purchaser took them to Hamburg, whence he intended to ship them abroad to peddle plaster images. The police were informed, however, and the children were returned to their unnatural parents.— *San Francisco Chronicle*.

(*The Opelousas Courier*, June 28th 1890) (Louisiana)

[Key words: boys; plaster ; images; abuse]

Infant industry: 1890

Now that works of art are likely to be placed on the free list, the Italian image and plaster cast peddlers of this country should rise as one man against a cut so radical which promises to smash with one blow an infant industry crying for protection.

(*Omaha Daily Bee*, March 29th 1890)

¹⁷⁶ Benjamin Harrison was the 23rd President of the US (1889-1893).

¹⁷⁷ Grover Cleveland was the 22nd and 24th President of the US (1885-89) (1893-97).

¹⁷⁸ From Philip Raynor’s *Bride or Major Villar’s Fatal Mistake*, by Rett Winwood.

[Key words: Italian; image; plaster cast; peddlers; humour]

A beautiful bust of his majesty: 1890

Down sat Mr Jones the dairyman, and immediately after dinner, seeing in Italian image-man passing by with a number of heads—"God bless me," said he, "Mr. Wilson, there's a beautiful bust of his Majesty; be good enough to lend me eighteen pence, I must have it to put opposite your cows." The artist instantly borrowed the money from the landlord, and Jones ran after the Italian, but turned down a wrong street, and could never find the way back.

(*Glasgow Herald* September 17th, 1890)

Art: 1890

Home art may include fancy work in its simplest pretensions; but if high art is sought one must go higher than the average means will permit. High art may be seen, but not possessed by the average beholder. A Vanderbilt may pay \$6,000 for two sheep and four cows on canvas, and consider it but a small purchase in the realms of high art. Another person wishing for something akin to high art, is blighted in the wish for the real, so buys a plaster of paris figure containing some pretense to symmetry of form, drapes it with a gossamer texture and places it in a shady corner on a dark pedestal.

(*Sacramento Daily Union*, September 7th 1890)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; figure; art]

A brutal and depraved nature: 1890

Although the famous Devonshire savages are now extinct, many Englishmen of an even more brutal and depraved nature exist, especially in some of our large towns. Such a one has just turned up at Liverpool, when a man named William Mitchard was charged with having assaulted an Italian name Pietro Passarotti, and also with having robbed him. The Italian, who was an image seller, called at prisoner's house and offered his goods for sale. Prisoner took a couple of busts from him, and put them on the mantel-shelf. He then took the man into his backyard, poured a couple of buckets of dirty water over him, first of all taking 15s out of his pocket. The chairman asked Mitchard why he did this, and the reply was, "Because he wanted me to stop pouring water on him, and I said I would if he would give me some money." The Chairman—but this was a most unprovoked assault. The prisoner—Oh you don't understand. He gave me the money because I promised not to pour any more water on him. The prisoner was committed to the assize.

(*The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, June 23rd 1890)

Play image boy: 1891

To walk well, one must first stand well. That's as good practice as any for this is the balance a large tea tray loaded with several wooden things which will not break as they fall and play image boy for 15 minutes at a time. It would be well if the contents were plaster and dinner depending on their safety, for a steady carriage would sooner be the result.

(*Pittsburg Dispatch*, November 8th 1891)

[Key words: image-boy; posture; tray; humour]

Crockery: 1891

"...Once in a while a purchaser gets nicely taken in. I recollect one of our sales we got \$13 for a large crate billed 'crockery.' A well-known physician was the purchaser, and when the crate was opened it was found to contain a lot of plaster of Paris images, such as Italians peddle about the streets."

"Worth \$5 perhaps to one of those peddlers!"

"Possibly, but not worth five cents to the doctor."

(*The Eugene City Guard*, July 11th 1891) (Oregon)

[Key words: Italians; plaster of Paris; crime; cost]

Broken Idols: 1891

Early yesterday evening the air on Harrison-street Wharf was blue with large-sized chunks of the choices profanity. The cuss words came from an Italian peddler of plaster images who, in pursuing the even tenor of his way with a tray of precious Columbus and Washingtons on his head, ran full tilt into a lumber-laden wagon and shivered his merchandise into a thousand pieces. Overcome by his emotions as he gazed upon the wreck of his statuary strewn upon the old wharf, he opened the safety-valve of his pent-up feelings and let her go.

(*The Morning Call*, March 14th 1891, p2) (San Francisco)

[Key words: Italian; peddler; plaster; images; Columbus; Washington; destruction; humour]

Generosity: 1891

Two English visitors, a man and a woman, passing out of the St. Petersburg Cathedral, after witnessing therein one of the ceremonies of the Russian Church, come across a little image-seller in tears, because one of his wares had fallen and been broken. The gentleman generously puts in the weeping child's hand a piece of money that more than pays for the broken image, whereat the little fellow, evidently believing that God had interfered in his behalf, falls on his knees, beats his breast with his childish hands, crosses himself repeatedly, all the while that his lips move in prayer. To his benefactor he gives but one swift upward glance of gratitude, and then "gathering his poor garments about him, he ran quickly away and disappeared in the gloom."

(*The Sacred Heart Review* May 30th 1891)

[Key words: image-seller; child; destruction]

Two dimples for ten cents: 1891

Delightful Remit of a Recent Whimsical Purchase.

A young Brooklyn Benedict sauntered down Nassau street several months ago in a reverie.¹⁷⁹ He was thinking of his home across the bridge. An interesting event was soon to happen there, and he was on his way to a fruit store to buy some dainties for his young wife. His face beamed with happy anticipation of the thanks of the little woman who awaited his return. He pushed through the crowd of pedestrians without heeding anything or having the train of pleasant fancies diverted until he passed a young Italian image peddler. The Italian's stock of plaster work was displayed in a high doorway out of the way of the busy throng. The sunbeam lighted up the statuettes. The Benedict looked down at them, walked on a few steps, then turned back. Two tiny busts had attracted his attention, one represented a boy crying, with his cap pulled away over his right eye. The other was a dimpled cheeked girl, laughing. They captivated the young Benedict's fancy. "How much are they?" he asked the Italian.

"Tena centa," replied the peddler, his face lighting up gayly at the prospect of a purchase. "All right, I'll take 'em," the Brooklynite said, and when the peddler had wrapped them in an old newspaper he tucked them in his overcoat pocket and continued on his way to the fruit store. He hid the images when he got home, and without his wife's knowledge placed them upon the mantel in the diningroom, where she would see them the first thing in the morning. "It will be a little surprise," he thought. The plan worked to perfection. The mistress of the household gave a little cry of delight as she caught sight of the girl's head. "What pretty dimples," she said, when the young Benedict came down to breakfast.

"Yes; rather pretty for the price. I thought you'd like 'em," the husband replied. In two months' time the happy event that the household had been looking forward to anxiously had happened. A good-natured girl baby had come to further distract the Benedict's mind from the dry details of business. He had weeks before forgotten the trilling purchase from the humble Nassau-street art purveyor. A week later the healthy infant looked up at the ceiling and smiled. Her fat cheeks creased into two unmistakable dimples. The Benedict laughed, he was immensely tickled. The dimples looked as pretty as could be, and he was proud of the fact. "But where on earth did the dimples come from?" he said. "There haven't been any in our families." "A happy whim of nature, I suppose," said the young mother, and she kissed each dimple several times. The Benedict went down to dinner alone half an hour later. His eye chanced to scan the mantel and rested on the five-cent bust of the laughing girl. "By George!" he fairly shouted, "there are those dimples now—the very ones. Well. I call that about the best investment of a dime I ever made."

It was another illustration of the whims of nature. The dimples had captivated the young wife. She saw them daily. They had made a lasting and pleasing impression upon her mind, and, as often happens, what the mother most admired had been reproduced in her child. "It's lucky it wasn't a boy" said the Benedict philosophically. "It might have been a crier of the worst description." — New York Sun.

(*Sacramento Daily Union*, April 28th 1891)

¹⁷⁹ A "benedict" was a newly-married man who had long been a bachelor; Nassau Street was a New York thoroughfare between Wall Street and the foot of Brooklyn Bridge.

[Key words: Italian; image-peddler; boy crying; girl laughing; cost; humour]

Licence fee: 1891

On each peddler or vender of plaster of paris or other images or ornaments each day, 1.00.

(*Roanoke News*, June 8th 1891)(North Carolina)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; ornaments; licence; images]

Injured with an image: 1891

Jerry Sullivan was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon Wednesday at his home at 21 Crocker Street by officer O'Malley. Sullivan, who is a junk dealer, claims that he found his wife and three or four women neighbors [sic] intoxicated. He remonstrated, and his wife picked up a fancy image made of earthenware. He took it from her to throw it away, but she turned and was hit in the back of the head. A scalp wound with some loss of blood caused the women tipplers to go into hysterics. They afterwards invoked the majesty of the law with the result recorded.

(*Morning Call* June 5th 1891)(PE)

[Key words: image; earthenware; crime]

Future archaeology: 1892

Who knows but what the plaster of Paris images now peddled out by Italians will be unearthed by some archaeologist 4000 years hence and gravely called idols worshipped in this day and age of the world?

(*The Saline County Journal*, May 26th 1892)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; Italians; images]

Must pay license: 1892

Image venders will hereafter pay the pedlars license.

Judge Mahoney decided a case yesterday which will make a considerable difference in the manner of dealing with the peddlers who sell plaster of paris bric-a-brac about the streets. Heretofore the officers about the court and policemen have allowed this particular class of peddlers to ply their trade unmolested and without license, the impression generally prevailing that they were exempted from the license ordinances by the fact that they manufactured their own wares. Yesterday, however, Casino Melloni and Elia Prezeiri were arrested for selling plaster of paris images and when Judge Mahoney brought the ordinance to bear upon the case it was found that, while it permitted farmers and hucksters to sell produce of their own raising, there was no provision to let out the manufacturing peddler. The prisoners were therefore find \$5 each, and hereafter they and others of their class will be required to pay licence.

(*St. Paul Daily Globe* January 22nd 1892)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; bric-a-brac; licence; images]

Without a license: 1892

Casino Melloni, who was fined \$5 in the municipal court Thursday for peddling plaster of paris images without a license, was brought in again yesterday on the same charge. He was fined \$10 in the second offence.

(*St. Paul Daily Globe*, January 23rd 1892)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; licence; court]

Exquisite figures: 1892

“Form and colour are cheap,” says Edmund Russell; “it is texture which is costly.¹⁸⁰ Put form and color in your homes if the fabric be not of the best.” This advice is recalled before the Italian image vender’s stand. Exquisite figures in plaster of paris of famous marbles can be had for two or three dimes, in which grace and poise, force of action, everything but the enduring quality are reproduced. A bust of Beethoven or Mozart, in a striking likeness, can be got for 20 cents, and when placed up on a piano with a scarlet paper Japanese fan open behind it becomes a suitable and pleasing ornament. Or a bust of Goethe, Schiller or Dante on a corner bracket in the library, with a bit of crimson drapery to bring it out, satisfies as well in plaster Paris as in marble, while it lasts. A suggestion is to paint the figures in orange shellac to give them the rich tinge of old Ivory. Every home with growing children should have reproduction in some form of the Venus of Milo. It is an education in itself to be brought up with it.

(*Pittsburg Dispatch*, June 12th 1892)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; image vender; cost; Beethoven; Mozart; Goethe; Schiller; Dante; Venus de Milo; education]

Supplying the natives: 1893

The Mississippi Valley Statue manufacturers have their craft moored at this point [Port Byron] and are supplying the natives with everything in the line of plaster of paris images.

(*Rock Island Daily Argus*, May 4th 1893, p7) (Illinois)

[Key words: statue; manufacturers; plaster of Paris; images]

Bronze statuary: 1893

The white plaster casts which the image venders sell for a trifle may be converted into bronze statuary scarcely distinguishable from the real thing by the following process: first apply a coating of thin shellac; when this is been allowed to soak into the plaster, paint with dull brown paint, and rub in with the hand a greenish bronze powder until the entire surface is evenly covered.

(*The Evening World*, May 19th 1893) (New York)

[Key words: plaster; casts; cost; bronze]

¹⁸⁰ Edmund Russell was an artist and lecturer.

A Hero Brought Low: 1894

It is really surprising at times to find out how little men know about the wares they are attempting to sell.

Quite recently an Italian with a basket full of plaster images over his arm entered a downtown business office and attempted to make a sale.

It was a dull afternoon, with no business doing, and the clerks and salesmen were engaged in reading the newspapers and in idle conversation. They turned their attention to the Italian as he entered, and one of their number began to guy him.

The Italian understood little English, and his replies to the crossfire of questions were conducive of laughter. This he took in good part, and finally he began to exhibit his merchandise. Among the images was a plaster bust of Mars.

“Mars, Mars,” said one of the men to him, as he read the name on the bust, “who in the world was Mars?”

“Oh,” replied the vender, not willing to admit his ignorance, “don’t you know? Why, Mars is chief of police in Paris.”

“Chief of police in Paris? Is he living now?” continued the gentleman.

“Yes,” replied the other. “He is a famous man. A great man. As great as your great Byrnes.¹⁸¹ Won’t you buy a bust of Mars, gentlemen? It’s an excellent likeness.” *New York Herald*.

(*The Roanoke Times*, January 28th 1894, p6)

[Key words: Italian; plaster; images; humour; Mars; Byrnes]

She Bought His Images: 1894

Busts of Bacon and Shakespeare at Fifteen Cents a Pound

You know those Italian peddler boys who go about with a tray load of plaster images on their heads? They make up a lot of the images in the dark and next morning they name them.

One of the peddlers went into a grocery on a storm-quiet day and begged with the customary pitiful eyes and guileful heart for a buyer. He was so persistent, he assured his hearers so emphatically that all the images were imported, he moaned over the ruinously low prices, that the young woman who had charge of the pickle department asked him what he would take for a bust of Shakespeare. He said: “Two dollar.”

“Who’s this?” asked the fair patron.

“Bacon,” said the boy.¹⁸²

“How much for him?”

“Three dollar.”

“I’ll give you twenty-five cents for the two,” said the girl.

“All right,” said the boy calmly and quickly setting the twain upon the counter.

But she was game. She bought them, solemnly declaring with beautiful heroism they were perfect likenesses, wrapped them tenderly in tissue paper and started home with them in the evening.

But the butcher boy from the other side of the store said next morning he had followed her part of the way home, and he vowed he saw her smash

¹⁸¹ Thomas F. Byrnes (1842-1910) was a detective who headed the New York City Police detective department between 1880 and 1895.

¹⁸² Francis Bacon (1561–1626), English polymath.

them against a fire plug and skip along without once glancing at the pieces.¹⁸³

(*The Guthrie Daily Leader*, May 23rd 1894) (Oklahoma)

[Key words: Italian; peddler boys; plaster; images; Shakespeare; cost; Bacon; humour]

Marksmanship: 1894

Dunphy volunteered to fight any man in the house, and Walsh drew a revolver and said he was going to clean out the place. As a specimen of his marksmanship he shot the head off a plaster image on the mantle. The shot caused a stampede, during which Walsh continued firing. The only result of his shooting was that he wounded himself in the left hand.

(*The Sun*, July 21st 1894)(New York)

[Key words: crime; plaster image; mantel]

Italian Boys: 1894

I pass frowning old Hanover Chapel, which is said, in the guide-books, to be an edifice of the Ionic order, and in its internal arrangements somewhat to resemble St. Stephen's, Walbrook.¹⁸⁴ I only mention this, to me, uninteresting pile for two reasons. First, because Hanover Chapel will, in all probability, speedily be swept away, and replaced by some secular building; and next, because the portico used, when I was young, to be haunted by Italian image boys, a race who appear to me to have almost entirely vanished from the Metropolis. They were wont to loiter on week-days under the columns of the portico, and rest their burdens on the pedestals. When did you last make acquaintance with the peripatetic youth with swarthy complexion and flashing black eyes, bearing on his head a board crowded with plaster-of-Paris effigies of the Venus of Milo, the Huntress Diana, the Triumphal Augustus, Canova's Three Graces, the Dying Gladiator, Shakespeare, the Great Duke of Wellington, and last, but not least, Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria?

I used to haunt the portico of the Chapel when I was a boy of fourteen, and at an English school at Turnham Green; and my visits to the Italian image boys were for the purpose of purchasing plaster casts of antique medals and *alti rilievi*, which they sold for a penny and twopence each.¹⁸⁵

(Sala 1894, 228-9)

[Key words: Italian; image boys; plaster of Paris; Venus de Milo; Three Graces; Dying Gladiator; Shakespeare; Wellington; Victoria; medals; cost]

Despised Plaster Casts: 1894

No one who has not seen them knows the really beautiful objects into which common white plaster casts may be transformed, and that, too, with only a trifling outlay of time and expense. In the streets of most large cities in the east, more than the west, and in New York city most of all, picturesque Italians hawk these commodities about at quite low prices.

¹⁸³ "Fire plug" = fire hydrant

¹⁸⁴ Hanover Chapel stood from 1832 to 1896. It was replaced by Regent House, in 2015 the location of the London Apple Store.

¹⁸⁵ Sala would have been 14 in 1842; *alti rilievi* = high reliefs.

They may be found, too, in many of the small art stores, sometimes in beautiful designs, and perhaps costing a little more. But the hawkers are the originals in the business and have the largest assortment. One may pass you often on the street, his nut-brown skin offering strange contrast to the trayful of chalky white statuettes and busts; but beyond a vague impression of this contrast you let him pass unnoticed. Pause next time, if you have an eye to the beautiful and a thought for economy, and examine his wares

Here, first of all, is a pair of little brackets, the size of which would just support an old miniature. From beneath the shelf of each peers one of Raphael's immortal cherubs. There are real gems in spite of their whiteness. Someone has very truly said that these casts are to sculpture what photography is to painting. Certainly, if you will take the time to examine into the delicacy and artistic quality of his wares, you will be able to add materially to the fin de siecle tone of your home. Some years ago the home of the plaster cast was the studio and art gallery, perhaps sometimes the club room; now they lend relief to a tinted wall, hang conspicuously over a mantel, peep from behind portieres and decorate many an otherwise characterless nook and corner.

[...]

... The next time you meet the dark-eyed image vendor do not thoughtlessly pass him by.

(*The Evening Star*, February 10th 1894) (Washington DC)

A Secret of the Trade: 1895

One evening, being perplexed at seeing some Italian image sellers continually hawking their trays of statuettes on their heads through the streets without a human creature ever appearing to buy any, the writer asked one of them if he had exercised his vocation long.

"Some years," replied the man.

"And did you ever chance to sell one of your figures?"

"Only now and then, sir."

"My good man," said the reporter, "do me the favor of telling me why you've been thus walking about for years with that load upon your head. Is in obedience to a vow which you have made?"

"No, sir; certainly not. It is to get my living."

"But you say you only rarely sell anything."

"I don't often sell anything, it is true," returned the man; "but there are so many clumsy people in the world that a day seldom passes without someone running against me and upsetting my tray. My figures are broken, and a crowd collects and makes the person pay for them."—*Edinburgh Scotsman*.

(*The Daily Bulletin* February 7th 1895) (Honolulu)

[Key words: Italian; image sellers; destruction; humour] [See also 1863]

Westminster Abbey: 1895

...he smiled when I put to him the all important question, "Where is my VON BÖÖTZ?"

"This is what I have done with him, Sir, said my house-renovator, leading me gently into what I take must have been his study. The apartment was furnished with two spades, a saw, two hammers, a pot of glue, a model of a fire engine, a couple of stools, and a sideboard.

"Look at this little lot, Sir," cried Mr Wilkins, whipping off a cloth, and exposing to view two earthenware flower vases, and a small model (in chalk) of an easily illuminated (there was a receptacle in the interior large enough to contain a taper) cathedral.

"What are these?" I demanded, in a voice more or less suggestive of thunder.

"That's what he gave me for the picture, and, asking your pardon, Sir, I think I've done well with him. It was one of those Italian image-men, who took a fancy to it. He offered at first only those vases. Then he sprang to a statuette of GARIBALDI. But, after a great deal of discussion, I got him to chuck in Westminster Abbey, Sir, which, as you see, can be lighted up magnificent."

"For a moment I was struck speechless with sorrow and indignation. No doubt the foreign hawker, having received an art education in Italy (the renowned dwelling-place of the Muses), had recognised the value of my picture, and had—, I paused in my train of thought, and jumped from despair to joy. There, resting on a newly-renovated perambulator, was my Old Master. I almost wept as I recognised my nearly lost VON BÖÖTZ.

"But there it is!" I hoarsely whispered, pointing to the picture.

"The canvas, yes Sir – the Italian chap only wanted the frame. He called the donkey lot rubbish."

(Punch, or The London Charivari January 12th 1895)

[Key words: Italian; image man; Garibaldi; Westminster Abbey; humour]

So very naked: 1895

On the other side of the stile, in the footpath, she beheld a foreigner with black hair and a sallow face, sitting on the grass beside a large square board whereon were fixed, as closely as they could stand, a number of plaster statuettes, some of them bronzed, which he was re-arranging before proceeding with them on his way. They were in the main reduced copies of ancient marbles, and comprised divinities of a very different character from those the girl was accustomed to see portrayed, among them being a Venus of standard pattern, a Diana, and, of the other sex, Apollo, Bacchus, and Mars. Though the figures were many yards away from her the south-west sun brought them out so brilliantly against the green herbage that she could discern their contours with luminous distinctness; and being almost in a line between herself and the church towers of the city they awoke in her an oddly foreign and contrasting set of ideas by comparison. The man rose, and, seeing her, politely took off his cap, and cried "I-i-i-mages!" in an accent that agreed with his appearance. In a moment he dexterously lifted upon his knee the great board with its assembled notabilities divine and human, and raised it to the top of his head, bringing them on to her and resting the board on the stile. First he offered her his smaller wares—the

busts of kings and queens, then a minstrel, then a winged Cupid. She shook her head.

“How much are these two?” she said, touching with her finger the Venus and the Apollo—the largest figures on the tray.

He said she should have them for ten shillings.

“I cannot afford that,” said Sue. She offered considerably less, and to her surprise the image-man drew them from their wire stay and handed them over the stile. She clasped them as treasures.

When they were paid for, and the man had gone, she began to be concerned as to what she should do with them. They seemed so very large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked.

(Hardy 1895)

[Key words: plaster; statuettes; bronzed; Venus; Diana; Apollo; Bacchus; Mars; images; accent; board; kings; queens; minstrel; Cupid; cost; bargaining]

Nelson: 1895

Sailor runs up against Italian image-boy. Boy: “Oh, my poor saint, my poor saint; you have broken his arm off.” Sailor (flinging the boy a shilling): “Never mind, mate; knock out one of his eyes out and sell him for Lord Nelson.”

(*The North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, December 2nd 1895)

[Key words: Italian; image boy; humour; Nelson]

Lovely but terrible: 1895

From her account it would seem that the hero of the narrative was a godlike individual, to whom Antinous and other supernally beautiful persons were but as shilling plaster casts on the board of an Italian image-vendor are to the Phidian marble. Not only lovely was he but terrible.

(Hunter-duvar 1895, 82)

[Key words: plaster casts; cost; Italian; image-vendor]

The Plaster Kitten: 1895

Once upon a time there was a *figurinaio* who went about the streets selling plaster figurines:

“Figurines, who wants my figurines!”

On the tray on his head, pot-bellied cats and rabbits nodded their heads and seemed alive.¹⁸⁶

“Figurines, who wants my figurines!”

One day he had done a good trade and had only a single kitten left. No-one wanted it, though it was no different to any of the other figures.

The unfortunate *figurinaio* shouted himself hoarse to no avail:

“Look! Here’s a nice kitty! Who wants this kitten, who would like it!

At that moment he was beneath the windows of the royal palace:

“*Figurinaio*, come in.”

¹⁸⁶ The animals are “noddors” with separately cast heads attached by a wire and counterbalance, so the head can move up and down.

He had never been lucky enough to sell any of his little things at palace, so, barefoot, he rushed in, mounting the stairs four at a time. But as he reached the top landing, he stumbled and fell full-length. The kitten was shattered.

The princess, who was running to the door, began to cry:
 “I want the kitten! I want the kitten!”
 “Princess, it is nothing; I’ll make another.”
 “No ! No! I want *this* one!”
 “If I had a little glue, I could stick it together again.”

Before he had finished speaking, the pieces of the kitten rearranged themselves and joined together. The *figurinaio* was as stunned as anyone. He almost wanted it back; that marvellous kitten might have made his fortune. But the King was serious, and he had to sell it to survive.

“How much do you want?” asked the King.
 “Your Majesty; the kitten is priceless.”
 The King gave him a gold coin.
 The *figurinaio* had hoped for more, and pocketed the money sulkily.
 “Are not you happy? Here’s another.”
 “Give him three your Majesty.”
 The King, in order not to displease his daughter, gave the *figurinaio* two more gold coins.
 “God help you!”
 The princess took the kitten to her room, and had fun all day making it nod its head.
 “Kitty, do you love me?”
 And the kitten said yes [i.e. it nods its head].
 “Kitten, will you still love me when you are a cat?”
 And the kitten said yes.
 “Kitten, shall we get married?”
 And the kitten said yes...

(my approximate and clumsy translation)

Il gattino di gesso

C’era una volta un figurinaio che andava attorno per le vie vendendo figurine di gesso:
 “Chi vuol figurine, chi vuole!”
Su la tavola che portava in testa sopra un cercine, vecchi panciuti, gatti e conigli crollavano il capo e parevano vivi.
 “Chi vuol figurine, chi vuole!”
Un giorno aveva fatto buoni affari; gli rimaneva soltanto un gattino. Non lo aveva voluto nessuno, quantunque niente diverso dagli altri venduti.
Il povero figurinaio si sgolava inutilmente:
 “Oh, il bel gattino! Chi vuole questo gattino, chi vuole!”
Si trovava in quel momento sotto le finestre del palazzo reale:
 “Figurinaio, venite su.”
Non gli era mai capitata la fortuna di vendere qualcuna di quelle sue cosucce alla casa del Re. Dalla contentezza non stava nei panni, e montava gli scalini a quattro a quattro. Arrivato all’ultimo pianerottolo, inciampa e casca quant’era lungo. Il gattino andò in pezzi.

*La Reginotta, ch'era corsa all'uscio, cominciò a strillare:
 "Voglio il gattino! Voglio il gattino!"
 "Reginotta, non è niente; ne farò un altro."
 "No ! No! Voglio questo qui!"
 "Se avessi un po' di colla, lo incollerei."
 Non aveva ancora finito di parlare, che i pezzetti si movevano, si
 ricercavano tra loro e s'incollavano da sé; e già il gattino crollava
 la testa e pareva contento di quella prodezza. Il figurinaio era più
 sbalordito degli altri. Quasi quasi avrebbe voluto riportarselo via;
 quel gattino portentoso forse sarebbe stato la sua fortuna. Ma col
 Re non si scherzava; bisognava venderlo per forza.
 "Quanto ne vuoi?" il Re.
 "Faccia Vostra Maestà; il gattino non ha prezzo."
 Il Re gli diede una moneta d'oro.
 Il figurinaio s'attendevo di più, e intascò la moneta di malumore.
 "Non sei contento? Eccotene un'altra."
 "Gliene dia tre, Maestà."
 Il Re, per non far dispiacere alla figliuola, diede al figurinaio altre
 due monete d'oro.
 "Dio t'aiuti!"
 La Reginotta portò il gattino in camera, e si divertiva tutto il
 giorno a fargli scrollare la testa.
 "Gattino, mi vuoi bene?"
 E il gattino rispondeva di sì.
 "Gattino, vuoi la gattina?"
 E il gattino rispondeva di sì.
 "Gattino, ci sposiamo?"
 E il gattino rispondeva di sì.*

(Capuana 1894, 137)

[Key words: plaster; figurines; cats; rabbits; magic]

An Iconoclast: 1895

By Elizabeth Pullen.¹⁸⁷

Young Mr. Broughton was, unawares and gradually, in process of evolution from the Journalist to the newspaper man. It took all sorts of rubs and surprises and facers and disillusionings to form him. That morning he was hurrying through Printing House Square on an assignment when he noticed before him a woman carrying on her head a tray of plaster images, and walking with the stately gait and even poise of the South Italian.¹⁸⁸ She was small, brown; she wore a gown of blue cotton, a woolen shawl, plaided in olive and yellow, and a red kerchief on her head. These glaring colors, however, made her a picture. To observe her Broughton passed by her and then looked back.

She regarded him calmly. "Buy a lit' San Samuele says-a his oration, signor?"

Broughton had no particular use for a praying Samuel, but he had various theories about our adopted citizens, and might have acquired something in the plaster cast line if at that moment a broad shouldered fellow had not come and jostled the little woman so roughly that the tray

¹⁸⁷ Portland author and poet Elizabeth Jones Cavazza Pullen, 1849-1926 was briefly married to an Italian (McGill 2008, 166) which might explain the sympathetic tenor of this piece. She was published by Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).

¹⁸⁸ Printing House Square was part of Chatham Street (later Park Row), New York, nicknamed "Newspaper Row".

was thrown from her head and went ruining to the sidewalk.¹⁸⁹ It was the end of the world for that population of graven images. They fell in a heap of indistinguishable fragments, mixing their dust in a replete democracy of saints, politicians, lambs, the three graces, and even a model of a beautiful foot labeled “Trilby.”¹⁹⁰ Little Samuel was past praying for, but he was no more thoroughly pulverized than the bust of Napoleon. Young Mr Broughton felt stirring within him an essay on the frailty of mundane things.

Then the air was torn with the lamentations of the woman.

“Oh, Madonna!” Next she denounced the cause of the disaster, who was moving away. “Head of big, you are-a. Why-a you hit-a me? What I ever done at you-a? You break-a my image—I not eat-a more!” She rattled her finger-nails along her front teeth to indicate the hunger which would be the consequence of the breakage of her stock in trade.

Meanwhile two bootblacks had seized the man by the elbows and, turning him around, ran him back face to face with the woman. She stood wringing her hands and wailing: “What ruin! Poor-a me!”

The aggressor was evidently also an Italian.

“Soy!” one of the bootblacks said, “yoose has gotter reach down inter yer clothes an’ square up wid de dago lady!”

“He’s a bloomin’ dago hisself,” commented the other boy.

Broughton had been painfully composing a few phrases of such colloquial Italian as his Harvard studies of Dante had rendered possible to him, and now uttered them in a stiff and toneless accent. In effect, he said that it was necessary to pay the compatriot for that which was broken.

“I only got-a ten cent-a, signor,” said the offender, handing the coin to the woman. He was permitted to go in peace.

“Ten-a cent-a! Madonna mia! For so mooch image!” sobbed she.

So Broughton put a dollar into his own hat and passed it around among the throng that had been attracted by the noise. When he gave the collection to the woman, she wiped her eyes, kissed his hands with many benedictions, and went her way.

Broughton's assignment had taken him in the direction of Mulberry Bend.¹⁹¹ As he returned through that quarter he saw a hundred yards in front of him a woman with a tray of images on her head. He quickened his pace and soon was near her. It was the same Italian; she had replenished her tray with more saints and heroes and graces. “So it is,” mused young Mr. Broughton—who still trailed clouds of the glory of journalism—“that in this world no one is indispensable. One perishes, another replaces him!”

Just then, swaggering around a corner, appeared the former breaker of images, and again, as if on purpose, he swung his arm rudely against the woman. As before, a crash, lamentations, and a crowd. The dwellers of Mulberry Bend, themselves well acquainted with poverty, gave of their few copper coins to her, who sat wailing among the ruins of her wares. They helped her to pick up such casts as were not irremediably broken, and to replace them on the tray. This time Broughton did not stay to act, as consoler. The aggressor had walked off rapidly, and the reporter

¹⁸⁹ The Infant Samuel at Prayer was no doubt a representation of Joshua Reynolds' painting of 1776. These figures are mentioned several times as part of the stock in trade of image sellers. The figure seems to have been well known at the time, though few have survived. P.G. Wodehouse describes the therapeutic effect, especially to aunts of a choleric disposition, of smashing a small statuette, preferably depicting the Infant Samuel At Prayer (P.G. Wodehouse Society, Netherlands 2009).

¹⁹⁰ Trilby: The title of a novel by George du Maurier published in 1894, and the name of its heroine. A jocular name for the foot (with reference to Trilby's feet, which were objects of admiration).

¹⁹¹ Mulberry Bend was an area of New York within the Five Points neighbourhood, infamous for its poor living conditions. It was demolished in 1997

followed him. After five minutes' chase, they turned into an unspeakably dirty alley, where the Italian entered a doorway, without noticing that any one pursued him. Broughton, having made sure that he should recognize the house again, hastened to the nearest police station and told the story. "She was a quiet, decent little body," he said to the officer. "That great hulking brute struck her on purpose the second time, even admitting that the first time might have been by accident."

Two policemen were detailed to accompany Mr Broughton, who was known to the chief of the station, and he led them straight to the door where the Italian had entered. Up the dark and broken stairs they climbed. Broughton shrank from contact with the slimy walls; it seemed to him that evil odors were depositing themselves there in a pestilential fungus growth. At last they emerged upon a landing. A child leaned over the baluster of the story above. Broughton tossed him a nickel.

"My little man, is there an Italian living in this house?"

The child picked up the coin and stared in silence.

"Say kid, is there a dago here?" one of the policeman translated.

The boy pointed with a thumb to a door at the left of the landing where the three men stood. Broughton felt the thrill of the righteous avenger. The malicious brute who had twice destroyed the wares of the poor little image vendor would soon be sent to the Island.¹⁹² And a good riddance for the community. One of the police opened the door and they entered. They saw at one side of the room a long work bench, covered with plaster images. The iconoclast sat there, carefully mending a broken figure. The woman was leaning over his shoulder, laughing as they chatted in their own language.

"Eh, I always say it, Pietro, you have a holy hand at mending them! If not we might lose by the game."

"I don't say, Marianna, that Saint Samuel is better than new, but at least he will stick until he takes another tumble."

So that was their trick! A piece of real Neapolitan cunning. Broughton decided that he ought to have seen through it sooner. The woman caught sight of the visitors, and ran forward with hands clasped: "We ain't done-a nottin'," she pleaded. "Dis our beez-a-ness. We all-a right-a!"

"Yes, you're all right," said Broughton, impulsively. "It was my mistake. I owe you a dollar for it." And he laid a legal tender coin—65 cents' worth of silver and 35 of faith, which is pretty well for the times we live in—on the work bench of the maker, breaker and mender of images. The Italian looked up with a real Neapolitan smile, radiant, many-toothed, wide and irresponsible.

"Tell me all about it," said the reporter.

"You not give-a me away, gent'emen cops?"

"No; go on."

"Look; it like this. We not sell image. And I say, you hear-a me, Marianna, we get more money to break all! She carry de image. Den I come-a wit grand force-a. Patatrae! All ruin-a! A-a-a-ar me! Dat Marianna. A-ah, poor! Dat people! Somebody take-a money in hat-a. Don't-a cry, poor voman! After, I mend-a what-a can, After, I, Marianna. babies, all eat. See?"

¹⁹² A prison on Blackwell Island, New York (Rikers Island was also known as "The Island", but did not become a gaol until the 1930s)

All this time the wife stood with four rather clean and very beautiful children clinging to her skirts and peeping shyly at the strangers. How could Broughton or any one else blame this happy family?

Indeed, Broughton has never formulated his views upon the case, although he used to take social problems very seriously. Whenever he meets Pietro in the street they exchange a glance of intelligence. Sometimes the Neapolitan, by a quick gesture, indicates Marianna further along the avenue.

And then Broughton, if he has time, assists at the —nth performance of the comedy of the iconoclast.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

(*The Princeton Union*, June 20th 1895 and

The Goldsboro Headlight, January 2nd 1896 (NC)

[Key words: Italian; plaster; images; costume; Samuel; saints; politicians; lambs; the Three Graces; Trilby's foot; Napoleon; humour]

Gold pieces: 1896

One of Mr Herrman's pet tricks when he was out in with a crowd was to strike a street vendor with plaster casts to sell or a confiding Italian in charge of a corner fruit stand and, after buying half a dozen oranges or small plaster images as the case might be, to break them open one after the other and find a five dollar gold piece inside of each one.¹⁹³ It invariably resulted in the Italian taking a hand in the game and cutting open half of his stock of fruit or smashing three or four of his plaster casts in hope of finding a few of the gold pieces himself. Herrman was very generous, however and always paid his victim back when fun was over.

(*The Anaconda Standard*, December 25th 1896) (Montana)

[Key words: plaster; casts; images; humour; trickery]

Pell mell: 1896

...il avait a son bras un immense panier dans lequel étaient pêle mèle, des platres de la Vénus de Milo, de Bonaparte, de la République, de la femme piquée par un serpent de Clésinger, de Daphnis de Prézieux, de Bayard, des figurines italiennes et des statuettes religieuses.

...he has in his arm a huge basket in which were pell mell, plaster casts of the Venus de Milo, Bonaparte, the Republic, of Clésinger's *Woman Bitten by a Snake*, of Prézieux's Daphnis, Bayard, Italian figurines and religious statuettes.¹⁹⁴

(*The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel and Journal of the 8th Senatorial District*, October 10th 1896)

[Key words: basket; Venus de Milo; Napoleon; the Republic; Woman bitten by Snake; Daphnis; Bayard, Italian; figurines]

Fast driving: 1897

Birney Barnett and William Willis, both colored, were found guilty in the police court yesterday of assaulting and robbing Candidi and Morris Barsatti, young Italian plaster image peddlers. They were also convicted of fast driving when Mounted Policeman Bradley attempted to arrest them on

¹⁹³ Alexander Herrmann (1844-1896) French magician – Herrmann the Great. Toured the US several times.

¹⁹⁴ Clésinger's *Woman Bitten by a Snake* = original in the Musee d'Orsay; "Bayard" was a magic horse.

Florida avenue, near Nineteenth street. Aggregate fines of \$25 each were imposed.

(*The Times*, June 23rd, 1896) (Washington)

[Key words: crime, assault, Italian, plaster image, peddler]

William Willis, aged fifteen, and Bennie Burnet, aged nineteen, both coloured residents of South Washington, Were arrested by Policeman Bradley of the county mounted force, and locked up on charges of fast driving, petit larceny and assault. The complainant's were Candide and Monica Barsotti, two Italians, who make a living by vending plaster images. The Italians were out near Connecticut Avenue extended and Pearce Mill Road Friday afternoon, when the two negroes, who were in a wagon, took several plaster images, valued at fifty cents, placed them in their wagon, and started to drive away.

The Italians endeavoured to recover their property, when they were assaulted. The negroes lashed the horse and nearly escaped. Policeman Bradley, who was in Cleveland Park, heard the screams of the victims, and, learning the cause, started after the robbers, capturing them, after a long chsce, at Kalorama Heights, on 19th street, and brought both men back.

(*Evening Star*, June 21st 1897)

[Key words: Italian; plaster; images; peddlers; assault; court]

Fight over an Italian Girl: 1897

On the wedding day her employer refused to let her go until \$75 was paid.

Binghampton, Dec. 10—Joe Christie, an Italian, who keeps a fruit stand in the city, some time ago went to New York and brought back a young and pretty Italian girl who had just arrived from Italy. The girl bore the name of Ondonea Barbari, and her beauty soon attracted the attention of the Italian residents. The little store did a rushing business, the young men being attracted to the place by Christie's protégé.

While her suitors were many, it was soon easy to discover that she preferred Joe Lamberto, who makes his living by selling images made of plaster of paris. Joe was infatuated with the girl and he went to Christie and proposed for her hand. He was told that Ondonea was there to work and not to waste time love-making. Lamberto was persistent, and was finally told that he could have the girl by paying \$36, which was the amount that he (Christie) had paid out for her. To this young Lamberto readily agreed, and the wedding was announced to come off yesterday morning at 11 o'clock.

When Lamberto went to the store for his bride Christie refused to let him have her until he paid the \$36. Lamberto said did not have so much money, but would make a payment down and then settle the remainder by instalments of \$4 a week. This wouldn't do, and Christie and Lamberto got into an argument that threatened to end in bloodshed. In the meantime the guests began to arrive, and Lamberto went amongst them and succeeded in raising enough money to make up the \$36. He went joyfully to Christy and tendered the money, but Christie refused it, saying that Ondonea was worth much more. In fact, \$60 had been offered for the girl, and he wouldn't take less than \$75. There was a big row in less time that it takes to tell it, and but for active interference murder would have been committed. As it was, Christie's place was partly demolished. The girl was locked in a back

room, and has since been kept there. Roberto says he will have his bride even if he has to cut Christie's heart out to get her.

(*The Sun*, December 12th 1897) (New York)

[Key words: Italian; plaster of paris; images; humour]

Had No Use for Images: 1897

Harry Williams, an engineer at the waterworks, was fined \$3 at police court yesterday on a charge of assaulting Peter Brucina, of 544 Gillis street, who peddles plaster of paris images.¹⁹⁵ The assault occurred several days ago, when Brucina solicited Williams to buy of his wares.

(*Kansas City Journal*, September 11th 1897)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; assault; court]

An Unhappy Couple: 1898

The husband used a dishpan and the wife a pistol.

James and Mary Silvestre were arrested this morning by Marshal McMillin and Policeman Rossi, the former charged by his wife beating and otherwise mistreating her, and the latter with taking a shot with a 45 calibre revolver at her dear hubby.

The Sylvesteres are from the land of Italy, but have been in the United States for a number of years, coming to the city from Pueblo or Cripple Creek, Colo, about two weeks ago. They are "image" builders, and on arriving in the city rented an adobe house on south Second Street, where they manufactured their wares and had their living rooms.

They have had quarrels innumerable, and this morning was no exception to the rule. The wife asserts that her husband took a washpan, in which they mixed the plaster of paris for their images, and used it over her head, smashing her in such a vigorous and cruel manner as to bring big welts of flesh on her head and to momentarily craze her.

This is the wife's story, which is somewhat over-balanced by the "tale of woe" told by the husband. He states that they, as usual, had a family jar, which enraged his wife to such an extent that she hurriedly secured a 45 calibre revolver, and as he was going out of the door took a shot at him. He yelled "perlice," and a telephone message was answered by Marshal McMillin, who, with Policeman Rossi, took charge of the unhappy husband-and-wife and placed them in the city jail.

The marshal found the bullet imbedded in the adobe wall of the house occupied by Silvestres solicitors, and will keep the flattened missile as a memento.

Later.

The case was brought before Justice Crawford at 2 o'clock, this afternoon, and as friends interceded in their behalf, after the husband and wife had agreed to no further violate the law, they were discharged. They have a child a year and a half old.

(*Albuquerque Daily Citizen*, October 15th, 1898)

[Key words: Italian; image makers; plaster of Paris; crime; humour]

¹⁹⁵ This house still stands, part of Kansas City's "Little Italy"

A damaged statue: 1898

Venus De Milo Taken for a Very Poor Piece of Work.

A swarthy son of Italy stepped into the office with his basket of wares—not bananas and oranges, but statuary, alleged. Pretty enough the samples were, stained with a light tinge of sienna to make them look like aged ivory.

“Who is that?” asked one of the boys. “Dat-a Napolyun, Napolyun ze gret. Dat-a good likeness.” “You make these?”

“Yaas, I mak-a dem. Mak-a de mould, too. You want-a buy dat-a piece uv Vognah, de gret moosishin. Dat look-a fin on a da piano.”

“What’s that?” asked the sporting editor, pointing to an armless figure.

“Dat-a Venus duh Meelo. Thirty cent-a. Dat cheap.”

“Why, that’s damaged. John. Whatcher trying to work off an old broken piece like that for? Thirty cents for an old broken plaster of paris figure? Throw it away.”

“Nah; nah! Dat-a no broken. De statute hav-a no arrums. Dah nevveh find-a da arrums. Nobody know what-a she do with her arrums. Dat no broke.”

“Aw, John, you can’t play us for greenies. Of course every woman had arms. I’d like to have that statue. That woman’s got a good shape on her, but I couldn’t take a second-hand piece like that home. My wife would throw it out of the window. I tell you what I’ll do. If you make me one of her with the arms on it I’ll give you thirty cents for it, but I wouldn’t give you a nickel for it in that damaged condition.”

“I tell-a you dat no damage. Dat Statue de fines’ in all de worl’. It ees wort millions dollas.”

“Without any arms?” said the sport. “Come off.”

“Yessah. Without any arms. Dis-a good copy. Thirty cents I make it to you foh a quarter.”

“Oh, no, John; I wouldn’t buy a woman without arms. Got any ballplayers in plaster of paris?”

John was disgusted and left. He thought the sporting editor was off his base. —Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune.

(*Sacramento Daily Union*, May 4th 1898)

[Key words: Italian; statuary; Napoleon; Venus de Milo; accent; humour]

Going broke: 1898

Just as the party were about to start an Italian image vendor came up and offered for sale to plaster-of-paris busts, one of Christopher Columbus and the other of George Washington. In a spirit of fun Colonel Chadbourne, who had become impatient at the long delay, picked up the bust of Columbus and dashed it to pieces on the ground. The Italian gazed ruefully at the broken fragments, and then with some quick movement, as if impelled by a sudden idea, threw the other bust down to join its shattered companion, saying: “Georga Washa, he go broka too.”¹⁹⁶ It was whispered that the Colonel also went broke settling the damage, but the truth of the rumor not be confirmed.

(*The San Francisco Call*, February 23rd 1898)

¹⁹⁶ As a result of the American revolution and other drains on his finances, George Washington was virtually penniless by 1789 (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/02/20/washington-was-broke-why-founding-fathers-were-strapped-for-cash.html>)

[Key words: Italian; image-vendor; Columbus; Washington; destruction; humour]

Bigotry: 1898¹⁹⁷

A Belfast man (says the “Manchester Guardian”) was charged in the police courts of his native city with entering the shop of an Italian image-seller and smashing up all her stock of statuary—Virgin Marys, saints and all. “Why,” asked the magistrate reproachfully, “did you destroy all this poor woman’s goods?” “Well,” answered the culprit, “ye see, the way it is wi’ me, Ah can’t stan’ bigotry.”

(*Auckland Star*, April 27th, 1898)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; Virgin; saints; humour]

Ashes: 1899

A New York woman filled up with wine and smashed things around in a lively manner because of the newspaper story that she traded the urn which were the ashes of her deceased husband for a plaster of paris image. The “storied urn” started her upon an “animated bust” as it were – Exchange.¹⁹⁸

(*Marietta Daily Leader*, May 11th 1899)

[Key words: humour; plaster of paris; image]

Italians Versus Portuguese: 1899

We learn with regret, but not without a certain misgiving as to facts, that the traffic in little Italian boys, who are kidnapped in Naples, Genoa, and Milan and sent to America with false parents has opened briskly this year. We cannot but think that the Neapolitan journal which makes the charge must be mistaken as to their destination. Of course, there used to be a great deal of that sort of thing when the immigration laws were less stringent and less rigorously enforced than at present. Advices from South America, however, leave no doubt that if wholesale kidnapping has been going on in the above named Italian cities, the destination of the urchins is not the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave, but Brazil, where already the Italian colony is said to be uncomfortably large. And we pity the respectable, dignified Portuguese families of Rio de Janeiro and other towns, for we know from past years experience what is in store for them. The little Italian boys play fiddles upside down and vend plaster images. And the playing is as barbarous as the sculpturing. It will be years before they can be graduated into fruit venders or organ grinders. In the meantime the nerves of innocent Portuguese will suffer.

(*The Washington Bee*, June 10th 1899)

[Key words: Italian; boys; kidnap; plaster; images; Brazil]

Unlucky to pick up pins: 1899

Why One Little Man Will Carefully Avoid Them in the Future.

“Do you believe that it is lucky to pick up a pin from the ground when it’s pointing towards you?” asked the little man with side whiskers.

¹⁹⁷ See also below: 1913, p 286.

¹⁹⁸ “Can storied urn or animated bust/ Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?” Lines 41 and 42 of Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

“Well I don’t know,” replied the fat man. “Do you?”

“I used to, but I don’t any longer. You see, I did it once. I was walking along and happened to see a pin straight in front of me, and pointing my way. The street was crowded. I hesitated—and was lost. I stooped down for that pin. A woman carrying a 3-month-old baby fell on top of me, and an Italian with a basketful of plaster of paris images fell on top of the woman. Then the fun began. The baby yelled, the Italian swore, the woman shrieked, and I did all three. And when they pulled me to my feet the crowd was shouting, ‘Lynch him! Lynch him!’ The Italian wanted to fight me, and the woman was shaking her fist in my face. The crowd got bigger and bigger and began to press around me.

“‘Kidnaper!’ [sic] yelled somebody. ‘He tried to steal the poor woman’s kid!’ Then the crowd took it up. ‘Kidnaper!’ they yelled. ‘Lynch him!’ Then someone, I think you he was hackdriver, tripped me up from behind and I felt suddenly and harshly on the broken remains of the statuette of Diana. Just when I thought the end had come two big policeman rushed through and got the three of us into a patrol wagon and took us to the station. Of course everything was arranged and explained in five minutes, and I squared myself with the Italian with a \$2 bill. And just as I was brushing the flakes of plaster of paris from my trousers, and going down the steps, a detective came out on collared me; swore I was William Jenkins, alias ‘Two-Toed Finegan,’ Alias ‘Billy the Bum,’ and showed a photograph and a description to prove his assertion. So I was taken back and held until I got three friends to come and identify me. I went home at 10 o’clock. The lieutenant said he was sorry. So was I.

“Now,” concluded the little man with the side whiskers, after a moment of reflection, “I believe there are luckier things than pins to be found.”—Chicago Inter-Ocean.

(*Juniata Sentinel and Republican*, November 22nd 1899) (Pennsylvania)

[Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images; Diana humour]

Beatricia and the Image Vender: 1900

The snow flurries were blinding the eyes of the passing throng, but Pietro stood valiantly at the curb, holding out his plaster images for sale. It seemed bitterly cold to the muffled, skurrying crowd, but it was warm and balmy to Pietro. Though the hands which held up the little white image of the winged victory or a bust of Beethoven were blue and stiff, and the narrow shoulders of the thin frame were doubled together in an attitude of cringing subjection, yet the eyes of Pietro were looking far beyond the brilliant shops of Fifth avenue. In his imagination he was wandering in the Elysian fields with his Beatricia, where the sunlight gilded the meadows and the smile of nature shone everywhere.

... the plaster Venuses and Mercurys and Sacred Marys stood side-by-side along the shelves of his shop, gazing down on him from their classic grandeur with a cold, un pitying eyes. Sometimes at night he thought he saw the imperious Milo shake her head disdainfully when he cried aloud. Mercury sneered, and a dimpled Cupid’s head, by Praxiteles, broke into amused mirth...

(*The Cook County Herald*, July 14th, 1900) (Minnesota)

[Key words: plaster; images; Winged Victory; Beethoven; Venus; Mercury; Mary; Cupid]

Miss Repplier's Cats: 1900

Miss Agnes Repplier, who is a prominent figure in Philadelphia's coterie of literary people, has a passion for cats, says the "Record."¹⁹⁹ But, strange to say, the deader they are the better she likes them. She has 39 altogether, and there isn't a live one in the lot. They are mostly plaster casts and images that have been presented to her by friends.

(*The Times*, July 15th 1900) (Washington)
[Key words: cats; plaster; casts; images]

Mistake: 1901

The only serious mistake she made was once in yielding to the blandishments of a persuasive Italian image man and promising to buy his whole tray of statues.²⁰⁰ I found the hall filled with these works of art, and Malia tendering, with sweetest smiles, a few pence in exchange for them.²⁰¹ It was a disagreeable job to have to persuade the man to depart in peace with all his images, even with a little money to console him.

(*Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, February 23rd 1901)²⁰²

The Middle-Aged Woman: 1901

...It is like one of those old-fashioned plaster-of-paris castles which image peddlers used to carry in numbers on their boards which held that ware. White and smooth and flawless and inane these castles were, until, a lighted candle being placed within them, the tiny windows became radiant and the small structure a thing of beauty.

(*The Philipsburg Mail*, August 23rd 1901)
[Key words: image peddlers; boards; plaster of Paris; castle]

Humour doesn't pay: 1901

If he comes your way, don't try to be funny at his expense. He is selling plaster images for—well, for anything he can get.

"Selling out," he said with a broken English pronunciation of which type can convey no adequate impression. "Marked down, five dollars to two dollars seventy-five cent."

"Don't want it," returned one of the clerks in the office he had invaded.

"Two dollar seventy-five cent," he repeated. "Need money."

"Don't want it," again asserted the clerk.

"Make offer," persisted the peddler. "How much?"

Here is where the humorist of the office force put himself in evidence. Winking at the others, he offered 50 cents.

"It's yours," promptly returned the peddler, handing it to him.

As before remarked, there are occasions when humor doesn't pay

(*The Evening Kansan-Republican*, February 15th, 1901) (Kansas)
[Key words: plaster; images; cost; humour]

¹⁹⁹ Agnes Repplier (1855-1950) Philadelphia essayist.

²⁰⁰ "Mary", a Zulu woman, Mary Anne Barker's nurserymaid in London.

²⁰¹ An Italian mispronunciation of "Mary"

²⁰² Later used in Barker 1904, 212.

Pasted the Image Man: 1901

The son of Italy who is endeavoring to eke out an existence in Butte by peddling plaster of Paris images is having a hard time of it. A few days ago he stood an open-handed tap for some of his wares in an East Galena street resort, and although he had the man arrested that performed the feat the matter was compromised.²⁰³ Yesterday he entered a North Main street saloon and showed a bronzed bust of Ben Franklin to the barkeeper with the remark that it was a correct imitation of George Washington and would be an elegant think [sic] to keep on tap on the anniversary of the birth of the first president, which would be next Friday.²⁰⁴ The bust was branded "George Washington." The barkeeper took two of the images, gave the peddler a glass of beer and a smash on the jaw and began to wipe the surface of his bar with a towel. The peddler liked the beer, but did not fancy the smash. Today he called at the county attorney's office to enter a protest, but when told it would cost him about two days' time to prosecute the bartender he replied: "Thank you sir; good day," and left.

(*Daily Inter Mountain*, February 19th 1901) (Montana)

[Key words: Italy; plaster of Paris; images; crime; violence; humour; Washington; Franklin]

Broke His Arm: 1902

Retailer of Plaster of Paris Images Meets with an accident

An unknown man whose home is in El Reno, who has been selling plaster of Paris images and bogus statuary to the people of Chickasha for a week or so past, held on his basket Saturday night at the Rock Island depot and broke his arm.

Jack Sawyer, landlord of "Jack's Place," picked up the injured man and took him to his place of business, where Dr Brown was sent for. Dr. Brown broke the record on setting an arm, fixing the peddler up in exactly twenty minutes, so he was able to take the train for home. His basket of idols will follow him today.

(*The Chickasha Daily Express*, November 10th 1902)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; statuary; basket; humour]

A dream of fair women: 1902

...on the coping of the wall, an image-seller had set out his wares. They were a dream of fair women, classic and modern. The solemn majesty of the great Venus was contrasted with Phryne hiding her eyes in a spasm of modesty.²⁰⁵ Clytie, with the perfect fall of her shoulders, rising from the lily leaves that fold back as if unwilling to hide so much beauty, stood droopingly beside the proud nakedness of Falguiere's Diana.²⁰⁶ The boy who presided over this gallery of loveliness— a meagre Italian, his facing nipped with frost—stood a hunched up, wretched figure, his eyes questioning the passers-by.

²⁰³ "Open-handed tap" = tricked out of his wares, or stolen? "East Galena street resort" = a brothel in a notorious red light district. Location of the US' longest-operating brothel.

²⁰⁴ Second use of "tap," meaning not clear. To keep nearby?

²⁰⁵ In 4th century BC Greece, Phryne was a famous courtesan, not known for her modesty. Figurines of her were usually of a naked woman, shielding just her eyes.

²⁰⁶ Falguiere's 1882/1891 statues of a nude Diana were much criticised. One commentator wrote that she was too plump, was "not Nudity but Nakedness" and the statues were merely "clever."

(*St Paul Globe* 25th September 1902)

[Key words: image-seller; Venus; Pgyryne; Clytie; Diana boy;
Italian]

LE MARCHAND DE STATUETTES: 1903

Petit métier, petit marchand!
Regardez, faites vos emplettes.
Plâtre ou biscuit, mes statuettes
Sont gentilles, d'air alléchant.
S'il n'en est point à votre guise,
(Plaire aux clients est ma devise)
J'en ai d'autres à l'atelier.
J'ai besoin de gagner ma vie.
Aussi je vais vendant et crie:
Petit marchand, petit métier !
Achetez, achetez, mesdames,
Dieu rend le bien aux bonnes âmes !
Faites-moi gagner quelque argent
L'hiver est dur, la bise est froide ;
Voyez, ma main est bleue et roide:
Petit métier, petit marchand!

(E. Roche, nd, on the reverse of an early twentieth century
postcard, Figure A1. 122, p 150)

Small image, small seller!
Look, buy.
Plaster or bisque, my statuettes
Are nice, with an attractive air.
If there are none to your liking,
(Pleasing customers is my motto)
I have others in the workshop.
I need to earn a living.
So I will sell and shout:
Small seller, small image!
Buy, buy, ladies,
God rewards good souls!
Let me make some money
Winter is hard, the wind is cold;
See, my hand is blue and stiff:
Small image, small seller!

(My translation, of sorts)

Where the art came in: 1903

I remember the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte was the leading article of our industry at this toy factory. When Napoleon was finished he stood up with arms folded across his breast, his right leg a little forward, looking defiance at his own English makers. He had a dark blue coat on, tightly buttoned, a buff waistcoat and white breeches. There were touches of gold on his coat and on his large black hat, with flat sides and point, with a high peak. These Napoleons must have been in large demand somewhere, for shoals of them were made at that time.

It is curious how a man who thirty years before had been a veritable ogre and demon to the English people should now have become so popular. If all the Napoleons made at this toy manufactory could have had life given them, then England, if not invaded, would have been crowded by military Frenchmen, and of the dreaded Napoleonic type.

I remember looking pensively at the figure many times, and wondering about all he had been a generation before, and of which I had heard so much.

It is difficult in these days to realise how the terror of Napoleon had saturated the minds of the lower classes in England. Yet, as I looked at the figure, it only then represented a name.

At this toy manufactory we did not make many figures so tragic and terrible in suggestion as Napoleon. George H. had designed a little toper publican with his left hand in his breeches pocket, and in his right hand a jug full of foaming beer. The face wore a flabby smile, which carried welcome to all.

We made cats, too, on box lids, representing cushions. We made dogs of all sizes, from "Dignity" to "Impudence." We made the gentlest of swains and the sweetest of maids, nearly always standing under the shade of a tree, whose foliage must have been blighted some spring day by an east wind, as it was so sparse in what seemed to be midsummer time.

It is astonishing what amiable squinting those swains and maids did in pretending not to look at each other. I have never seen squinting so amiable looking in real life. But that was where the art came in.

(Shaw 1903)

[Key words: Napoleon; toy; manufacture; publican; cats; dogs; swains; maids]

A transplanted bit of Italian life: 1903

... Who would dream of looking for Italian romance and tradition in prosaic Indianapolis? And yet what is more tinged with romance than the art of the statuette maker...

Some day when you feel in the mood for a long walk just take a stroll down South Delaware Street, and about two blocks beyond St Vincent's Hospital you will come across a dingy, uninviting little frame structure.²⁰⁷ Its one big window is almost impenetrable with the dust of years and the weather-beaten door, with its dirty windowpanes, gives one the impression that it was never meant to be opened to visitors. The little building, as a whole, seems to have been forgotten in the march of progress, and your first thought is that it is unoccupied. And then you chance to notice, scrawled across the dusty window up near the topmost framework where the spiders are, the name "E. Gauspari" painted in modest little letters, and directly under it the information that "statuettes are made here."²⁰⁸ It is the house of Guaspari.

You will not find the building so uninviting inside, but when you come out of doors again you're pretty sure to be covered with a fine white dust that refuses to be brushed off with anything less than a stiff broom. The floor, the walls, the long wooden table where the image makers labor, the workmen themselves, are white from their shoes to their naturally black hair, for plaster of paris is like the alkali of the Arizona desert—its

²⁰⁷ The manufactory was at 505 South Delaware Street according to a contemporary directory.

²⁰⁸ "Gauspari" = a typo in the original.

conquest of everything in its way is not to be withstood. In the main room of the place three men with their sleeves rolled up above their elbows and their shirt collars turned back, disclosing swarthy necks, sit near the long wooden table, busily engaged in the manufacture of the little images that are afterwards to be sold in the big department and notion stores or peddled about from house to house by fellow-countrymen

Erigo Guaspari has three assistants—Antonio Tomeoni, Orosco Mariani and Pietro Lena—all of whom learned the trade of the image maker, when boys, in sunny Italy. They are all artists, too; to watch them at their work is to admire the wonderful precision with which every little feature of their work is accomplished. They know more about the masterpieces of sculpture than do many of the self-satisfied art critics, and, when one comes to think of it, is not a community greatly benefited by their presence? In the pursuance of their labor they really do more to improve the general taste, to place copies of known sculpture within the reach of all, and to familiarize the public with what is good, than any school (which only a few can attend), then any gallery (which the working classes seldom visit), or any other institution in the country.

Guaspari is the controlling force of the little art shop. He it is who feels the public pulse and decides whether the next lot of statuettes had better be Madonnas, or Beethovens, or Shakespeares. He contracts with the big department and china stores to keep them supplied with everything they might require in the way of plaster of paris images, and he it is who sends out the young Italian peddlers to solicit trade in the residence portions of the city. Hundreds and hundreds of little statuettes that are to be seen in Indianapolis households were carefully planned and more carefully manufactured down there at Guaspari's modest little workshop in the shadow of the great hospital.

The image-makers are an interesting little company of men. Antonio Tomeoni, the youngest of the party, is but a mere lad, who has been in the United States only long enough to learn something of the English language, which he speaks with difficulty and with frequent lapses into his own soft, musical tongue. Handsome as many of the statuettes of Apollo which he makes himself, he is just the sort of fellow to be sent out into the city in quest of customers, and when Guaspari thinks it is time to secure some extra trade, Tomeoni is the one to go forth after it. With twinkling black eyes, Tomeoni explains that he "likes not to go from house to house when the snow and ice is on the ground, and then, you know"—and he points, with a humorous gesture, first at the frail little images on a table near-by and then at his own graceful limbs—"I am not so vera gooda on da slip'ry," and laughs at the imaginary catastrophe.

A little apartment, hemmed off from the workshop by thin board partitions, is the wareroom, and here are to be seen statuettes of all descriptions. Mozart, wrapped in thought, rests beside a wicked little Bacchante; Venus de Milo poses in all her wondrous loveliness near a triumphant Napoleon, who stands with folded arms surveying a laughing African dancer. Over in one corner under a shelf is a bust of Cyrano de Bergerac, but alas! the end of his nose has been broken off. Cyrano without all of his nose!—No wonder that he has been relegated to an obscure hiding place where the scornful eyes of his brother and sister statuettes may not cause him to crumble all to pieces. The curious little apartment is a picturesque place; the workshop that surrounds it is even more picturesque, and the-dark skinned image-makers are the most picturesque of all. Decidedly the house of Guaspari is well worth a visit.

(*The Sunday Journal*, January 25th, 1903) (Indianapolis)

[Key words: manufacture; Italian; plaster of Paris; Madonna; Beethoven; Shakespeare; accent; Mozart; Bacchante; Venus de Milo; Napoleon; African Dancer; Cyrano de Bergaerac]

Homes and their decoration: 1903

With discretion and little money almost any house maybe made interesting with plaster casts. This discretion, it goes without saying, it must be displayed in the choice which the buyer makes. Streets of large cities are full of image-venders; large important stores on principal avenues are now devoted to reproductions in plaster, so that one is no longer obliged to search, except for purposes of economy, in narrow side streets or tenement-house districts as one was obliged to do not so many years since.

These large stores, of course, have carefully selected examples, and one pays for the knowledge and judgement of the shopkeeper. But if one has money enough, these stores are always to be recommended, more particularly when one does not know what to buy. The grotesque and the ephemeral avoided in them, and when the grotesque is indulged in, as when the gargoyles of Notre Dame are shown, it is because a special genius has stamped it, or because some historical association has made it famous.

The image-venders, on the other hand, carry everything in their heavy heavily laden baskets, displaying on the steps of some empty house worthless casts of diving women together with the head of the Venus de Milo or the marvellous "Winged Victory," pipe-rests, and busts of French dancers. They have among all their trash some good examples, and they come from out of the way shops in which any number of other good models may be found. Every example, for instance, shown in the illustrations has been purchased from a street vender with the exception of the beautiful Andromeda, by Bauer, on which there is a copyright, so it is only sold in certain places, and the lovely Tanagra figurine reproduced for museums.

The image-vender carries all of these in his baskets, none of them more than seventy-five cents, in many cases only fifty or twenty-five, and, if desired, he will tone the cast with yellow without extra charge. One must remember that the pure white cast, while agreeable in certain places, is often too strongly accented in others, so that toning becomes a necessity.

One wants, of course, to avoid making a "spot" of the plaster cast. For instance, one small cast on a dark wall with nothing about it in the way of pictures or books is apt to prove the only visible thing in a room. On the other hand, when a cast is large and important, it may be treated with the dignity that one observes in hanging pictures, as that famous group of "Singing Boys," by Luca della Robbia, in bas-relief, from the Duomo at Florence. This deserves a place to itself over a mantelpiece, or a panel at one side of the room maybe given to it. So, too, many of the Madonnas, always in bas-relief, may be treated.

The "St Cecilia" is well known, and is to be found in almost every group of plaster casts. It is in bas-relief. It has been toned to a yellow, although it is even more lovely in pure white. This, too, deserves the panel to itself, and should be treated with dignity.

[...]

Many names have been given to "The Diver," by Thorwalsen: like the "Narcissus," he costs about fifty cents from a vender. In stores he

sometimes costs many dollars. He is the very embodiment of strength, vigilance, and manly courage, and becomes a companion in almost every room.

All of the large stores and most of the better-known image-venders publish catalogues of casts, with their names and prices. These catalogues are sometimes a great service, although I have never chanced to find in any of them the name of a little bas-relief I have known for years. It is a very beautiful Madonna, with exquisite face, and her hands folded across her breast, looking down the infant Jesus and St John. The young Italian image-vender who gave it to me one Christmas years ago told me that it came from the altar of an Italian Church, where it was considered so precious that the doors of a small shrine were always kept closed before it. He added that a priest allowed a young sculptor to take a cast of it at night, the man stealing in through a window to do so. At any rate, some ten or eleven years ago not many had been seen in this country. And yet it now costs about twenty-five cents, its staining not being counted extra. It is too small to be treated by itself unless special panel is prepared for it.

Barye, the famous French sculpture, who died in 1875: made the four groups of animals shown outside the Louvre in Paris. These belong to the history of art, and almost every image-vender has one of his casts, some good models having been put on the market. His "Tiger Devouring a Crocodile," and a beautiful lioness are also sold. None of these is expensive—the lion costing but fifty cents. The cost of it in bronze is enormous, and well out of the reach of most of us. But the fifty and seventy-five cent casts of it give us the form and the movement and wonderful detail. I do not know where the mould was secured, nor whether it is made from one used for the bronzes, but everything in all these casts depends on the mould. Image the image fender endeavours to get the best, and goes to find new ones. Occasionally he is permitted to take a cast of some original statue, just as the young Italian sculptor did in the church at night. Or he is fortunate enough to get a mould from some cast in a museum. Then his fortune is made. Very few of the small casts of the Venus of Milo, however, are made from beautiful models, and I have never seen a small one that did not disappoint me. I never buy one. The casts of the "Winged Victory" are better, especially when made from a large model, but then they cost of six or eight dollars, and must be given a place by themselves.

"The Narcissus" on the other hand, is beautiful wherever placed, although the smaller models show a bad forefinger. The original is in the Museum at Naples among the group of masterpieces. Its beauty the whole world has recognized.

[...]

But enough has been said to prove how easily a plaster cast lends itself to decorative purposes, and to the pleasure of the householder as well. That it involves no serious outlay has been shown. Fifty cents is the average price, a good cast being always possible for that sum.

(French 1903, 363-368)

[Key words: plaster; casts; image-venders; location; baskets; diving women; Venus de Milo; Winged Victory; French Dancers; Andromeda; Tanagra; Singing Boys; Madonna; St Cecelia; The Diver; cost; Narcissus; animals; taste]

Art Discouragement Deplored by Hawker: 1904

Arrested for Selling Clay Images Without Licence Derides Spirit of Materialism Reflected by Ordinance

By James C. Crawford

Signor J Pelechi's hair flicked his velveteen shoulders as with head aback he derided the public lack of art appreciation reflected by his arrest for hawking clay statuettes without license. It was sad commentary on the vaunted culture of this community, he averred, that no discrimination is shown as between the peddler of fish or vegetables and the vender of articles promoters of aesthetic taste.

"Whatta da use." He demanded, "of the artist trya ta maka da leev if he peenched when he no hava da lice? Ha, ha! Itta maka me seeck."

It was Signor Palechi's second arraignment on the charge of violating the license ordinance, the first one having resulted in his dismissal with a warning, a fact of which he was gently reminded by Police Judge Morgan.

"Malatesta," was the rejoinder.²⁰⁹ "Whatta da diff, eh? Sella da stat no maka damon lack sella da feesh. Catcha da feesh—maka da stat, eh? Paya da lice an' be brok all da time, eh? Ha, ha! Notta mooch! No, sare!"

The judge explained that his function was not to make laws or repeal them, but to aid in the enforcement of such laws as operative. Regrettable as was the non-exemption of art works from taxation by license, such taxation must be obeyed by the court until it is wiped from the ordinance book.

Enquiry developed the information that Signor Palechi's endeavour to elevate the art standard of this materialistic city consisted of his manufacture at home and offering for sale abroad miniature plaster images of personages famed universally or locally. His collection of molds enabled him to turn out exact counterfeits of Napoleon Bonaparte, Mrs Carrie Nation, Garibaldi, Young Corbett, William J Bryan, Aguinaldo and May Irwin.²¹⁰ He was preparing casts of "Battling" Nelson and Mrs Chadwick but was uncertain as to whether he would finish the former.²¹¹

Case continued till January 6.

(*The San Francisco Call*, December 22nd 1904)

[Key words: Accent; licence; humour; court; plaster; images; Napoleon; Carrie Nation; Garibaldi; Corbett; Bryan; Aguinaldo; May Irwin; Battling Nelson; Mrs Chadwick]

Trouble: 1905

I have seen a good deal of trouble in my life, but never one yet that did not have an Italian image-vendor somehow or other mixed up in it. Where these boys hide in times of peace is a mystery. The chance of being upset brings them out as sunshine brings out flies.

²⁰⁹ "Malatesta" = literally "bad head", a malicious person.

²¹⁰ Carrie Nation (1846-1911) was a temperance activist who wielded an axe on several taverns in Kansas; "Young Corbett" was probably James "Gentleman Jim" Corbett (1866-1933), heavyweight boxer; William J. Bryan (1860-1925) was a leading Democratic politician; Emilio Aguinaldo (1869-1964) was the first President of the Philippines, having led the country to independence from Spain in 1898; May Irwin (1862-1938) was a vaudeville actress and singer.

²¹¹ Battling Nelson was the nickname of Oscar Nielsen (1882-1954), Danish boxer and world lightweight champion. Using the name Cassie Chadwick, Elizabeth Bigley (1857-1907) passed herself off as Andrew Carnegie's illegitimate daughter and defrauded several banks.

(Jerome 1905)

[Key words: Italian; image-vendor; destruction; humour]

Sympathy: 1905

Mrs Ogden Goelet is very charitable and is almost leading in Paris at the present in charitable works, which are becoming fashionable. The latest to win her sympathy have been the little Italian image sellers of the boulevards, and, with the countess de Bearn, she arranged an aristocratic concert in aid of them.

(Omaha Daily Bee, November 5th 1905)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; children; Paris; charity]

A common-enough sight: 1906

During this stage of his journey, to make matters worse, he had rather a fright. He met an Italian image seller – a common enough sight in those days – who spoke to him and sat down beside him when he was resting, and when he started again the man rose also and walked on with him.

After a time the pedlar drew out a penknife and admiringly displayed before him its large, bright blade, which only made little Herbert shudder, for it crossed his mind that perhaps a man meant to murder him!²¹²

At last they reached a little inn, and it was the greatest relief to the boy to find that although they would give him a bed, they refused one to his companion, who accordingly had to walk on.

(Two 1906, 135)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; threat; racism]

Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes: 1907

“Jacques!” “Mother”! They give each other one a last embrace. His mother sobs as her child turns around again and again to see her in order to etch deeply in his eyes the face that he senses he will never see again, while his beaming selfish father waves a satisfied paternal goodbye to the child he had just sold. His master is cruel, the child inexperienced. Lost in a brutal Paris where life is like a battle, chased by the police, rejected by passers-by, the small statuettes seller often comes home at night with a full basket and few earnings. Then he faces beating, starvation, unbearable persecution, exploitation of the weak by force. One day little Jacques returns with his basket full of debris, his statues smashed into pieces. Ah, if only he could disappear a hundred feet underground with his pieces of plaster! In any case, there was no time, for the master walks in, casts his cold eye over the basket and the child, grabs him by the shoulders and sends him tumbling into the street. Little Jacques wanders with a heavy heart, anxious, sensitive, terrified amidst the thousand cries of Paris, the rumble of its cars, the panting breath of the huge, bustling city. His imagination is at fever pitch, his heart races and he is overwhelmed by terror of this human swarm in the midst of which he feels so small, so weak, so lost! Almost starving and worn out by fatigue, the child slumps against a wall and begins to sob. A passing stranger saves him from his

²¹² “Herbert” = Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) Philosopher, sociologist and biologist.

distress. Rescued and finally adopted, little Jacques repays, with tenderness and generosity, his appreciation of this good man.

(Paraphrase by the author of synopsis in French at Filmographie Pathé)

Travesty: 1907

[Easter at the Theatres]

George H Carr and Marjorie Jordon will supply laughs for all. They are travesty artists and Carr will portray an Italian image vendor and later give a burlesque of Sparticus the Gladiator.²¹³

(*The Sunday Oregonian*, March 31st 1907, 39)

[Key words: Italian; image vendor]

The bookworm: 1907

[The 1907 film *The Book Worm* features a young man who walks the streets reading a book, bumping into a variety of characters as he makes his way and of course] “he encounters an Italian image-seller, whose tray is knocked off his head and the sidewalk covered with broken images. The Dago demands pay, but not getting it, pelts the bookworm with the fragments”

(IMDb)

Cupid: 1908

Would you, then, be in fashion in your proffer of valentines in the progressive year 1908? If so, you must dispense with illustrated postals and discard the time-honored creations of lace paper and hand-painted satin in favour of a more up-to-date love token. The new keepsake, if you will be abreast the times, must be a statuette or a plaster cast of Cupid. The sculptured image of the god of love may be in any one of a variety of forms and, likewise, is there a wide range of poses to choose from.

[...]

On the other hand, the young man of modest means may secure, perhaps, a replica of this same statuette, or at least, one equally artistic, moulded in plaster or composition, for one or two dollars.

[...] Statuettes of Cupid have long been among the most cherished art objects in many American homes.

(*Los Angeles Herald*, February 16th 1908)

[Key words: Cupid; plaster cast; statuette; cost]

Mother-in-Law is Blamed: 1909

Matters came to a crisis December 16 last. Mrs Janosky, Goldsmith swears, at that time made an attack on him with a plaster image of dog and might have damaged physiognomy considerably [sic] and he not pushed her away and wrested the artificial canine from her. Goldsmith admits that in the scuffle, Mrs Janosky went to the floor, but says this was necessary or else an accident.

(*Omaha Daily Bee*, February 11th 1909)

[Key words: crime; assault; plaster; image; dog]

²¹³ “Travesty” was a form of comic imitation of well-known characters, topics or productions, often involving cross-dressing.

Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes: 1909

Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes
C'était un tout petit enfant,
Venant de Rome;
Il avait à peine sept ans,
Pauvre petit bonhomme!
Sans père ni mère, seul dans la vie,
Venant de la ville jolie,
Il avait de grands yeux très bleus,
Des yeux étranges,
De longs cheveux bouclés, comme ceux d'un ange
D'un ange blond de cieux!

[Parle]
Jolies statuettes, Monsieur?
Jolies statuettes, Madame?
Santa Belli!

Et c'est ainsi que chaque jour
L'enfant offre sa marchandise;
Hélas! Il n'en vend pas toujours
Et le pauvre fait mine grise.
Car l'homme qui l'envoie travailler
Exige que chaque jour il rapporte
De l'argent pour aller ripailler,
Et gare si vides sont ses menottes,
Lors, le soir tout seul dans un coin,
Il songe au beau ciel d'Italie:
Puis il s'endort, le cher bambin,
Revant d'une maman jolie!

Un jour qu'il venait de s'installer
Au coin d'une rue près d'une impasse,
Il vit un chien abandonné;
Alors il lui dit à voix basse:
"Tu es tout seul comme moi, eh bien? Viens!
Puis, lui faisant mille caresses,
Il emmena le bon vieux chien,
Dont les yeux brillaient de tendresse,
Et depuis avec son ami,
Quand il va vendre ses statuettes,
Notre bambin lance son cri
Joyeux ayant le cœur en fête!

[Au Refrain]

Mais voilà qu'une nuit soudain,
La brute qui lui servait de père
Lévit à la porte, avec son chien
Malgré ses larmes et ses prières;
C'était l'hiver, il faisait froid,
La neige tombait en silence;
L'enfant, le chien, remplis d'effroi,

L'un contre l'autre tremblaient d'souffrance,
 Dans le coin d'une porte tous deux,
 Ils tombèr' nt là, puis s'endormirent,
 Tandis que làhaut, dans les cieux,
 La lune commençait a luire!

[REFRAIN]

C'était un tout petit enfant,
 Venant de Rome;
 Il avait à peine sept ans,
 Pauvre petit bonhomme!
 Sans père ni mère, seul dans la vie,
 Venant de la ville jolie;
 La vie, hélas! Pour lui paraissait si étrange
 Que le Bon Dieu
 Fit descendre deux anges
 Pour le porter aux cieux!²¹⁴

(Luccia Folver 1909)

The Little Statuette Seller
 Was a little child,
 Who came from Rome;
 He was barely seven years old
 Poor little fellow!
 Without a father or mother, alone in life,
 He came from a lovely town,
 He had very large blue eyes, strange eyes,
 Long curly hair, like that of an angel,
 A honey-coloured angel from heaven!

[Spoken]

Pretty statuettes, sir?
 Pretty statuettes, madam?
 Beautiful saints!

And so every day
 The child offers his merchandise;
 Alas! It does not always sell
 And poverty makes him frown.
 For the man who sent him to work
 Demands that each day he brings in
 Money so that he can go carousing,
 And beware if his hands are emy...,
 In the evening, alone in a corner,
 He thinks of the beautiful sky of Italy:
 Then he falls asleep, the dear child,
 Dreaming of a beautiful mother!

One day when he was resting
 At the corner of a dead-end street,
 He saw a stray dog;

²¹⁴ Bibliotheque National de France, 2015 <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k385115f>>

Then he said softly:
 “You’re all alone like me, are you? Come!”
 Then, giving him a thousand caresses,
 He adopted the old dog,
 Whose eyes shone with tenderness,
 And since with his friend,
 When it will sell its statuettes,
 Our toddler launches his cry
 Happy to the heart!

[Refrain]
 But then one night, suddenly,
 The brute who acted as his master
 Closed the door, with his dog
 Despite his tears and prayers;
 It was winter, it was cold,
 The snow fell silently;
 The child, dog, full of terror,
 One against the other trembling with pain,
 In a doorway both,
 They fell there, then fell asleep,
 While up there in the sky,
 The moon began to shine!

[REFRAIN]
 It was a little child,
 Coming from Rome;
 He was barely seven years
 Poor little fellow!
 Without father or mother, alone in life,
 From the pretty town;
 Life, alas! For it seemed so strange
 May God
 Send down two angels
 To take them to heaven!

Master Cupid: 1910

If there is a plaster image or two on the table of Master Cupid with his bow and arrow—one of the dainty eight-inch figures which may be had of the Italian image man for 25 cents or so—the table would be still more suitably garnished.

(*The Sunday Oregonian*, February 6th 1910)

[Key words: plaster; image; Cupid; image man; size; cost]

Why He Got His: 1910

The vender of images, who had just been thrown out of a large office building, wept bitterly as he looked at his torn clothes and broken wares.

“Who did this?” inquired the friendly cop. “I’ll pinch ‘em if you say the word.”

“No; it was my fault,” said the victim, gathering up the remains of a plaster image. “I insisted on trying to sell a bust of Noah Webster to a meeting of simplified spellers.”—Denver Republican.²¹⁵

(*The Holbrook News*, March 11th 1910)

[Key words: image-vendor; violence; Webster; humour]

Velvet voiced: 1910

As they swung past the corner the squat, velvet voiced Italian from the store in his basket offered the man a small plaster image of the Christ child. Big Jim tossed the man a dollar and put the little symbol of goodwill to men into Molly Shane’s willing hand.

(*The Argus*, December 5th 1910)

[Key words: Italian; basket; plaster; image; Christ child]

Kiddynapped: 1911

O! My Billy! My head will turn right round
If he’s got kiddynapped with them Italians:
They’ll make him a plaster parish
Image-boy, they will, the outlandish tatterdemalions!²¹⁶

(*The Times Dispatch*, April 16th 1911, p6)

[Key words: Italian; image-boy; accent; humour]

And He Did 1911

(McAlester Capital)

The threat of the Western Republicans to begin slashing the tariff in general because dissatisfied with some of the provisions of the Canadian agreement, recalls the old story of the Italian vendor of images. “Sellee ze image! Sellee ze image! Garibaldi, George Wash.” A brutal stranger picked up an image of Garibaldi, asking whose it was. “Garibaldi Who is he?” With natural pride the Italian said: “Garibaldi, ze grand, ze noble Italian patriot.” The stranger remarked: “D— Dago.” And he smashed the image on the pavement. “You smashee ze Garibaldi,” screamed the Italian. “I smashee ze George Wash!” And in his rage he proceeded to destroy half his stock.

(*The Guthrie Daily Leader*, June 23rd 1911)

[Key words: Italian; image-vendor; Garibaldi; Washington; humour; racism; destruction; humour]

El Dorado: 1912

Those of us who are no younger young will remember the Italian image-sellers who haunted the streets of London in our childhood with their pretty little figures of the Madonna and the infant S. John, busts of Garibaldi, and sentimental groups of sleeping children and dogs. We have probably forgotten or may never have known that many of these bright-faced men and lads came from Barga. The trade of *figurinaio* has always been followed by the Lucchesi, but Barga is especially known as the

²¹⁵ Noah Webster (1758-1843) was the publisher of the *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), which promoted American spellings (<https://www.noahwebsterhouse.org/discover/noah-webster-history.htm>); The Simplified Spelling Board was created in 1906 to reform American English spelling, financed by Andrew Carnegie. The initiative had failed by 1920.

²¹⁶ A tatterdemalion is “a person in tattered clothing” (Collins Dictionary)

metropolis of the *figurinai*. Though passionate lovers of home, the citizens of this mountain fastness leave it to penetrate into the farthest corners of the world. They may be found anywhere from New Zealand, to Copenhagen, but the United States is now their El Dorado. Since they have added some education to the characteristic energy of their race, they often go out at [sic] *figurinai* and return as men of substance.

(Ross and Erichsen 1912, 353-4)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; Madonna; St John; Garibaldi; sleeping children; dogs; Barga; New Zealand; Copenhagen; US; success]

Misbilling: 1912

Anthony Moriconi and David Guidugli doing business as the Moriconi Statuary company in Cincinnati, plaster of Paris images as crockery.²¹⁷

The Castnucci company of Cincinnati; plaster of Paris images.²¹⁸

...it is alleged the shipper defeated the published railroad freight rate by securing through false representation of the character of shipment a lower rate than that to which he was entitled.

(*The Topeka State Journal*, February 22nd 1912) (Kansas)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; images; crime]

A Good Belfast Story: 1913²¹⁹

The "Manchester Guardian" contains some good Belfast stories. A Belfast man was charged in the police courts of his native city with entering the shop of an Italian image seller, and smashing up all her stock of statuary—Blessed Virgins, saints and all. "Why?" asked the magistrate reproachfully, "did you destroy all this poor woman's goods?" "Well, answered the culprit, "ye see, the way it wi' me, A can'a stan' bigotry."

(*The Catholic Press* August 7th 1913) (Sydney NSW)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; Virgin; saints; humour]

Le Petit Marchand de Statuettes: 1913

Little Joseph Nulli, the son of poor artisans, is forced to leave his village to make a living in Rome. His father sold him to an Italian, who taught him the image-selling business. But little Joseph has no sense of commerce. He daydreams in the streets of Rome, swaps statuettes for schoolbooks or uses them to throw at nasty kids. So at the end of the day he dares not go back home to his master. He falls asleep beneath a tree where the Marquise de Riarzo, passing by, finds him. The chance meeting decides the future of the child. The Marquise, who lost a son the same age, pities the fate of the small statuette seller and adopts him. Raised with his adoptive sister, Mary, the little boy's friendship with her soon turns into love. His studies, however, separate him from his girlfriend. Sent to the Naval Academy, he becomes a naval officer and when he qualifies, returns to his family. But in his absence, Mary, who considers him a brother, got engaged to Baron Ventimiglia. The return of the young officer reveals their mutual love. But it is too late! Joseph, to forget, decides to go to war and joins a squadron of torpedo boats crossing the Dardanelles. He returns, covered with medals

²¹⁷ Antonio Moriconi (c1873-1928) emigrated from Calomini near Lucca to Cincinnati in 1898; David Guidugli (1877-1918) cousin of Antonio Moriconi. Moriconi Statuary was at 420, 430 Sycamore St and 242 Main St Cincinnati.

²¹⁸ W. Castrucci Company.

²¹⁹ See also above, 1898, p270.

and glory. But nothing matters to him! He has not forgotten and believes his wound is incurable. But the former little statuettes seller was born under a lucky star! Back in Rome, he learns that his love is returned and that Mary broke her engagement in order to marry him.

(Paraphrase by the author of synopsis in French at Filmographie Pathé)

Peddling without a license: 1917

Later, while on city business in the eastern part of the city, the officials came across two Greek peddlers of plaster Paris images and took them in tow. The Greeks who gave their names as G. Brassi and G. Landi and Des Moines as their headquarters, were taken before Judge Johnson on a charge of peddling without a license and were given time to get the money to pay the fines.²²⁰ Imposition of sentence was set for this afternoon. The men left their wares with the municipal judge as security while they sought the money. Is not unlikely that the mayor and superintendent of public safety will provide themselves with night sticks and become a special auxiliary to the police force, and should the Greek pedlars fail to reappear Municipal Judge Johnson may enter the plaster statue business.

(*Evening Times-Republican*, October 30th 1917) (Iowa)

[Key words: plaster of Paris; licence; humour]

Municipal revenue: 1917

Specified sources of municipal revenue, including special assessments, business taxes other than on the liquor traffic, general license taxes and license taxes on dogs, in cities having a population of over 30,000.

Little Rock: Images or statuary

Jacksonville: Images sold on street

Tampa: Images, street vender

Macon: Images sold on streets

Memphis: Images, plaster of Paris, etc

(*The Ogden Standard*, March 17th 1917)

[Key words: licence; images; statuary; plaster of Paris]

Valuable it ain't: 1917

The plaster image of a saint stood safely in the shed

While John West, the owner, slept soundly in his bed.

A thief came down the alley and stood before the door,

Looked through a tiny crack and saw the dirty floor.

On the floor there rested in the dead still hour of night

The plaster image of the saint, calm, serene and white.

The thief paused not a moment, gently he op'ed the door,

And picked the plaster-paris saint right up from off the dirty floor.

John West lives on Sixth street, number 1232,

And 'twas early in the morning, before the theft he knew

John took the loss to heart, 'twas as much as he could bear,

To stand in the empty shed and see the saint not there.

He called police headquarters and told them of the theft,

His voice it trembled strangely, as of man bereft.

²²⁰ G. Brassi and G. Landi are obviously Italian names rather than Greek!

‘Twould seem the owner valued this plaster-paris saint.
 He did, but not in money, for valuable it ain’t.
 “How much was it worth?” the policeman asked routinely.
 “It ain’t worth but 50 cents, the owner said serenely.
 So if anyone sees a burglar with a plaster-paris saint,
 Tell Mr West about it, he’ll make a strong complaint.²²¹
 (*The Washington Times*, January 9th, 1917)
 [Key words: plaster of Paris; image; saint; cost; value; humour]

Veteran of Italian war in Bismarck: 1918

Sebastine Torti, who claims that he fought 22 months in the foremost trenches of the Italian army without sustaining a scratch but was honourably discharged at the end of that time because of ill health, is in Bismarck selling plaster of Paris images and other wares common to his country. Sebastine was in Des Moines, Ia., when his country called him two years ago. He possesse [sic] a remarkably accurate knowledge of affairs at the Italian front, and there would seem to be no reason for doubting his story that he is one of the first real veterans of the Italian campaign to return to this continent.
 (*The Bismarck Tribune*, September 3rd 1918)
 [Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images]

A personage of sufficient importance: 1920

It was a tradition that Sanguinetti’s grandfather had been an Italian image-vender in the days when those gentlemen might have claimed in America to be the only representatives of a care for the fine arts. In the early part of the century they were also less numerous than they have since become, and it was believed that the founder of the transatlantic stock of the Sanguinettis had by virtue of his fine Italian eyes, his slouched hat, his earrings, his persuasive eloquence, his foreign idioms and his little tray of plaster effigies and busts been deemed a personage of sufficient importance to win the heart and hand of the daughter of a well-to-do attorney in the state of Vermont. This lady had brought her husband a property which he had invested in some less brittle department of the Italian trade...

(James 1920, 122)
 [Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images]

Snow: 1922

Coming slowly along the white highway two small boys were espied, each carrying on his head a raft-like platform laden with plaster-of-Paris images. They were dark-complexioned little fellows, not more than twelve or thirteen years old; and were having difficulty to keep their feet and stagger along with their preposterous burdens.
 The plaster casts comprised images of saints, elephants, giraffes, cherubs with the little wings tinted pink and yellow, at all Madonna and

²²¹ I have reformatted this doggerel poem for readability.

child, a bust of George Washington, a Napoleon, a grinning Voltaire, an angel with a pink trumpet and an evil looking Tom Paine.²²²

I suppose the loads were not as heavy as they looked, but the boys are having a hard time of it, to judge from their distressed faces peering anxiously from underneath the rafts which, at each step, rocked to and fro and seemed always on the point of toppling. Frantic clutches of small brown hands and the quick shifting of feet alone save the smash-up.

The master was still in this courthouse were some of the older boys and girls; but the younger ones had rushed out when the bell rang.

“Hi, where are you going?” several shouted. “What you got on your heads?”

The little strangers turned their faces and, nodding violently, tried to smile ingratiatingly. Someone let fly a snowball, and in a moment the mob of boys, shouting and laughing noisily, chased after them. No harm was intended; it was merely excessive spirits at getting up from school. But the result was disastrous. The little fellows faced round in alarm, cried out wildly in an unknown tongue and then, in spite of their burdens tried to run away.

The inevitable happened: one of them stumbled, fell against the other, and on the both went headlong with the crash. The tall Madonna was broken in two; Washington had his cocked hat crushed; the cherubs had lost their wings; and as for the elephants and giraffes, there was a general mixup of broken trunks and long necks.

The little fellows scrambled to their feet, and after a frightened glance set up wails of lamentation in which the word *padrone* recurred fast and fearfully.

[...]

A *padrone* had brought them with nine other boys from Naples to sell plaster images for him; we gather that this man, who lived in Portland, cast the images himself. The only English words he had taught them were “ten cent”, “tewenty-five cent” and “fifty cent”— the prices of the plaster casts.

A few days before, in spite of the bitterly cold weather, he had sent them out with their wares and bidden them to call every house until they had sold their stock. Then they were to bring back the money they had taken in. He is given a package of dry, black bread to each of them and told them to sleep at night in barns.

Sales were few, and long after their bread was gone they had wandered on, not daring to go back until they had sold all their wares. What little money they had taken in they dared not spend for food, for fear that the *padrone* would whip them!

[...]

One of the boys were slightly larger and stronger than the other; his name, he managed to tell us, was Emelio Foresi. The first name of the other was Tomaso, but I’ve forgotten his surname. Tomaso, I recollect, had little gold rings in his ears. His voice was soft and, and he had gentle manners.

[...]

They found the *padrone* in a basement, engaged in casting more images. At first the Italian was very angry; but partly by persuasion, partly

²²² Thomas Paine (1737-1809): politician, philosopher, revolutionary and opponent of organised religion.

by putting the fear of the law into his heart, they make him promise not to send his boys out again until May.

(Stephens 1922, 277-280)

[Key words: Italian; plaster of Paris; images; saints; elephants; giraffes; cherubs; Madonna; Washington; Voltaire; Napoleon; Thomas Paine; abuse; *padrone*]

Barga: 1926

An attractive figure that used to decorate the streets of London was the Italian image seller with his tray of plaster figures, writes the London correspondent of the “Manchester Guardian.” Mr Pennell in his new book tells how he discovered in the eighties in the hill town of Barga, near Lucca, that nearly all the men had been to America selling images of Christopher Columbus, and spoke some English with American idiom.

I happened to visit that delightful remote town just before the war, and found nearly all the townsmen speaking English with the Glasgow idiom and accent. The founder of the ice cream trade in Scotland was a Barga man who ultimately possessed some fifty ice cream shops, with the chief ones in Glasgow. [...] It was very curious that the same small town within thirty years should have been centre of American-Italians and Scottish-Italians with a quite different trade connection.

(*Evening Post*, May 8th 1926) (NZ)

[Key words: Italian; image-seller; plaster; figures; Barga; Lucca; Columbus; accent]

A craze for the miniature: 1929

Modern bric-a-brac, as distinct from antique pieces, reveals a craze for the miniature (writes P.H.E. in the London “Daily Chronicle”). Innumerable tiny houses and cottages, whole farm- yards, packs of hounds with huntsmen, and ever[y] fox, every description of quaint bird and beast, natural and grotesque, parade on our mantelshelves and occasional tables. The little figures are of china, blown glass, ingeniously carved, or oddly jointed knobs and geometric shapes in wood, or first cousins of the painted lead soldiers of our early youth.

(*Sunday Times* May 19th 1929) (Perth WA)

[Key words: miniature; houses; farmyards; birds; beasts; china]

The mantelpiece: 1931

On Grannie’s mantelpiece there stands
 A golden clock with golden hands.
 Its face is very white and neat,
 And it has little golden feet.
 And there are lots of china things;
 A little boy with feathery wings,
 A prickly sheep, a dog with spots.
 A funny house with chimney-pots.
 And in a frilly, flowery dress,
 A very smiling shepherdess.
 And at the end of all the rest
 Are vases (which I like the best),
 All hung with crystal bars and balls,

Making bright places on the walls.

—Rose Fyleman, in the School Journal.

(*Chronicle*, July 23rd 1931) (Adelaide)

[Key words: mantelpiece; china; cherub; sheep; spotted dog;
house; shepherdess]

Marchand de Santi-Belli: 1939

Le marchand de statuettes de Saints de plâtre, vêtu d'une longue blouse blanche, étalait ses modèles sur un éventaire à rebords bien équilibré sur sa tête. Le petit Saint-Jean, la Vierge, la Sainte-Famille, etc., s'alignaient à côté des tirelires "dinhèirolos" à couleurs vives : tomates, pommes, etc. et des jouets naïfs: canaris, petits lapins blancs à collier pointillé de rouge, dans lequel balançait la tête.

"Santi belli, belli !" annonçait sa voix trainante, et, en un clin d'oeil, un essaim de jeunes mamans, bébé sur le bras, s'empressait autour du modéleur italien. Et ce n'étaient que cris de joie et petits bras tendus vers ces fragiles merveilles, jouets d'un jour, dont les mamans, aïeules aujourd'hui, n'ont pas perdu le souvenir.

The vendor of beautiful saints.

The vendor of plaster statuettes of saints, dressed in a long white coat, displayed his models on a rimmed tray balanced on his head. Miniature St. Johns, Virgins, St. Familes, etc., were arrayed beside piggy banks "Dinhèirolos" in bright colors: tomatoes, apples and the like, naive toys: canaries, small white rabbits with red dotted collars which swayed their heads.

"Beautiful, beautiful saints!" he drawled, and in a wink, a swarm of young mothers, babies on their arms, gathered around the Italian modeller. And the mothers, grandmothers now, haven't forgotten the cries of joy and the little arms extended towards those fragile wonders, toys for a day.

(Gardel 1939, 174)

[Key words: plaster; tray; St John; Virgin; St Famile; piggy bank;
tomatoes; apples; toys; canaries; rabbits; noddors]

Appendix III:

The image of the broken cow and other Old Bailey stories

Introduction

The proceedings of the Old Bailey, just a few streets to the east of Plumtree Court, offer a fascinating and sometimes disturbing glimpse of life in that part of London during the nineteenth century. The records are also valuable because they provide (sadly, tantalisingly few) tiny details relevant to this project, especially the estimated value at the time of ornaments as well as how they were regarded. Some of the objects were from middle- or upper-class contexts, but others were from less prestigious surroundings. Though the survey is undoubtedly sketchy, the record serves as a sample of what was almost certainly going on in other cities at the time, as well as moments from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century everyday life.

In the first 130-odd years of the Old Bailey records, “image” and “images”, as decorative objects, are mentioned in about 50 cases (the records have not been digitised beyond the 1870s). The most common reason for their inclusion is that objects of value or importance were frequently hidden under or within them on the mantelpiece. Watches were also often hung from them – indeed some miniatures were made specifically for this purpose.

The first mention of an “image” in the records occurs in January 1730, when Obadiah Henshaw was “indicted for stealing a Leaden Image, value 10 s. the Goods of Joseph Beachcroft , Esq ; January 2. The Fact appearing plain, the Jury found him Guilty to the Value of 10 d” (t17300116-26).²²³ Henshaw was sentenced to transportation. Another lead image is mentioned in May 1753 (t17530502-10).

In June 1761, George Gings and John Lamb were accused, and acquitted, of stealing five “plaister of Paris” images, valued at two shillings, from Jacob Salla.²²⁴ “The prosecutor being a foreigner, and could not speak English, an interpreter was sworn.” It is likely that Salla was a Jew. One of the images was described as a horse, another as a “Jesus” and another as “a man.” Salla appears to have been terrified by the affair, which occurred in Bridewell prison. Salla was, it seems, locked in for fun by the turnkeys, and on finally being released, abandoned the images he left behind and broke more when he collapsed outside (t17610625-36).

In December 1766 there is a mention of “cups and saucers of image china,” the only reference to this combination of words that I have so far come across. It may be that this describes china bearing decoration (t17661217-31).

Eleven year old Thomas Hawkins, whose mother took in washing at her home in Bolton Street, was in August 1769, carrying a bundle of clothing belonging to Daniel Webb, of Old Change. He stopped “to look at an image about as tall as myself at a mug shop” when he was

²²³ Old Bailey reference numbers in brackets.

²²⁴ All spelling and punctuation is as in the original.

relieved of his bundle by Jane Beddis, 19. She was found guilty and transported (t17690906-87).

The highway robber Edward Millson attempted to hide a silver watch he'd stolen on the king's highway "near Pancrass" from John Tomlin in his room in a common-bawdy house "crammed up in the hollow part of a plaister of Paris image; a piece of rag was stuff'd in to keep it up" (September 1770) (t17700912-39). And in June 1773, searching for evidence of coin clipping, John Clarke saw three images on the mantelpiece of the accused Samuel Bennett "the middle was what they call an angel". The clipped gold was wrapped in paper, concealed in the image. Bennett, who denied that the images were his, was eventually acquitted (t17730626-67).

Fanny Hart was transported in 1775 after being found guilty of stealing property from Emmanuel Fernandez that included "a china image tipt with gold, value twenty shillings" (t17750531-61).

In April 1797, Henry Butler was sentenced to death for stealing a silver watch worth £3 that had "hung on a china image on the mantle-shelf" of Stephen Loosely, a butcher at Aldersgate Street (t17970426-22). On 13th July 1804, the landlady of The Mitre, in Aldgate, sold Thomas Bennett a half pint of porter. He gave her a shilling, which she laid "upon the mantelpiece, under an image". Having given him a sixpence and fourpence three-farthings change, she discovered that the shilling was "a very bad one" (t18040912-40).

There was an image shop in Rider's Court, Cranbourn Street in 1806 (t18061029-55) and another in Marylebone Street (t18061203-32).

When goods were pawned, the shop would provide a record that was sometimes called a "duplicate". These were often stored inside or beneath images, as in the September 1815 case of William Finlay, who hid his inside an image on the mantelpiece at his lodgings (t18150913-145), although his was for stolen property.

William Watson was sent to prison for six weeks in October 1824 for stealing an image worth two shillings (t18241028-65), while in June 1826 Mary Ann Elliott and Mary Harlow were found guilty of stealing an "earthenware image, valued at two shillings," from a shop on Oxford Street (t18260622-192).

An image of a "broken cow", one of five images that a girl in the public house had in a bundle "to ornament the taproom" of The Crown in Ratcliffe Highway, featured in a case in January 1830, when Richard James Price was found guilty of stealing six shirts and a handkerchief (t18300114-235).

George Lowton had put 17/6 "under a little image" on his mantelpiece, only to have it stolen by his lodger, James Rockwell, in February 1831 (t18310407-125). Later in 1831, Ann Clapton stole a necklace from Edwards Nelson. It had been "hung on an image, over the mantelpiece" (t18311201-273). Samuel Nesbitt kept five gilt sixpences wrapped in paper under an image on the mantelpiece (January 1833) (t18330103-79), while Isaac Russell kept a counterfeit half crown under an image on his mantelpiece (January 1835) (t18350105-430).

“Chimney ornaments”

The following, necessarily incomplete survey, focuses mostly on “chimney ornaments,” “china” ornaments and “images” that were given monetary values:

In March 1800, five chimney ornaments amongst possessions stolen by burglar Richard Blakesley from a house in Haverstock Hill, St Pancras, were valued at £1, and two “china images” were valued at 6d. The china images were taken from “the beaufet” in the parlour – beaufet has been variously defined as a niche, cupboard or sideboard (Webster 1913). Blakesley was sentenced to death, but it seems the sentence was commuted (t18000528-1).

Edward Page valued the four chimney ornaments stolen from his Goswell Street (Finsbury) shop in January 1804 at 30 shillings, though the court disagreed, valuing them at 20 shillings. They had been on show in the widow of his pawnshop. The culprit, seventeen-year-old Thomas Lee, was fined a shilling and imprisoned for six months (t18040215-45).

The relative values of decorative objects might be suggested by a case in December 1815, in which 60 “glass ornaments” were valued at £4 (t18151206-113).

It was “great distress” that led Thomas Fox, 64, to steal five chimney ornaments from Benjamin Topham’s hotel in St James’s Street, in February 1818. The objects were valued at 5 shillings, and Fox was imprisoned for a month (t18180218-78).

A “set of chimney ornaments” was valued at 18 pence in December 1819 (t18191201-143) while “two chimney ornaments” were valued at two shillings in January 1822 (t18220109-

37). In 1824 “two china images” were stolen from a Park Lane property. Their upper class origin is reflected in their value of five shillings.

(t18240218-24). This was in marked contrast to the twelve ornaments valued at three pence that Francis Gosling was accused of stealing in February 1825. (t18250217-58). A theft later that year from a garden summer house in Hoxton included three chimney ornaments worth one shilling (t18250915-75). Eight chimney ornaments stolen in December 1825 from Robert Williams, a labourer, who was lodging in Brighton Street, Grosvenor Square, were valued at four shillings. (t18251208-153).

William Richards, 19, denied stealing two chimney ornaments, valued five shillings, from Charles Robertson’s sitting room in February 1827, saying that “a man came and put them in a gateway; I took them up”. (t18270215-123). The ornaments having been found in his pocket, he was found guilty and imprisoned for one month. In May 1827 two chimney ornaments stolen from Potters Row, Cambridge Heath, were worth two shillings (t18270531-225). Sophia Mendoza was transported for seven years having been found guilty of stealing and pawning, amongst other things, seven chimney ornaments, valued at seven shillings (May 1828). Her defence that she’d been given them to pawn by the owner’s wife when drunk was not believed (t18280529-170).

By December 1830, two earthenware ornaments were valued at only two pence.

Nevertheless, Margaret Oddell, 25, was transported for seven years for their theft and that of a candlestick worth two shillings from her lodgings (t18301209-171).

A set of chimney ornaments stolen from surgeon Samuel Woodard in January 1831 was valued at £1 (t18310106-121). William Palmer was found guilty of stealing glass objects from his place of work, a glass lamp manufacturer (September 1832). They included six ornaments worth £1 and two bronze figures worth six shillings (t18320906-318). Having sold seven ivory figures worth four shillings to a schoolfellow at Bishopsgate Charity School for a halfpenny each, John Maulkinson, a 14-year-old errand boy, was found guilty of stealing them from David Hicks, his employer, “a turner and toy dealer.” The boy claimed that he had stolen them to prevent his schoolfellow from beating him, one not being enough (“he gave me two or three punches to the head”). Maulkinson was “whipped and discharged” (t18320906-322).

November 1832, two china ornaments valued at one shilling (t18321129-130), September 1832, one image valued at two pence (t18320906-139); September 1833, two chimney ornaments worth five shillings (t18330905-99), October 1833, six Chinese ornaments valued at six shillings (t18331017-56).

Two of the three defendants accused in November 1833 of breaking and entering the home of St Pancras zinc manufacturer William Keyzer were sentenced to death, though again the sentence was not carried out. Amongst their haul were “several china ornaments” from the drawing room and “seven or eight china ornaments” from the rest of the house, together valued at £15 (t18331128-4).

Having unsuccessfully tried to hide two china mugs in his hat, James Flowers attempted to hide the four chimney ornaments, also referred to as “images,” he stole from his employers

in December 1833, in the straw in “the back place”. The images were valued at nine shillings, though their owner told the court they could be sold for “seven shillings the pair” (t18340102-73). Flowers was imprisoned for three months.

April 1834, three chimney ornaments worth two shillings (t18340410-152), three china ornaments valued at 1/6 (t18340703-97). For stealing two images valued at 2 shillings six pence from pawnbroker Maria Newby of Drury Lane, George Robinson was sentenced in February 1835 to a year’s imprisonment. Robinson told the court that because his eyesight was very poor, and being destitute, he decided “to be in prison for the remainder of my life, in order to be supported” (t18350202-515).

The three defendants were sentenced to death in November 1835 for breaking and entering a small cottage in Norwood owned by William Bryant, the keeper of the Horns Tavern in Kennington. Amongst the goods stolen were five ornaments valued at £2 (t18351123-2). Four china ornaments worth five shillings were stolen from “the mantelpiece of the front bedroom” along with a number of other possessions, when George Loscombe and John West broke into the home of Thomas Spiers in Lark Hall Lane, Lambeth in April 1836. The pair were transported for life (t18360509-1360).

Though most of the “images” discussed in this research were ceramic or plaster of Paris, they were also made of other materials. Two unfinished “brass images” worth £1/5/0 were stolen from brass-founder John Warner in November 1837 (t18370102-362). In January 1837 Alice Lewis stole a number of objects from her furnished lodgings including four ornaments worth 2/6 (t18370130-573). Her landlord at Stepney Causeway was a sail maker, and the

case is interesting in that, as in a number of other cases, furnished lodgings included “images” and ornaments.

In January 1837, Thomas Rosevear stole a number of items, including three ornaments valued at two shillings from his master, an Edmonton shoemaker. The 13-year old told the court that “I was paid so low for my work I could hardly get my living—I could get a place in London, I knew, if I could get a few clothes; and therefore I got up in the morning and took these things.” (t18370130-584)

Mary Ann Rupkins, who in August 1837 stole, amongst other things, an ornament worth 6 pence from her mistress explained that “I pawned this gown and shawl for food, as my mistress did not give me sufficient—I was kept up from six o'clock in the morning till one or two, till my mistress came home from the theatre.” (t18370918-2073).

No fewer than 15 chimney ornaments, valued at 12 shillings, were amongst a number of objects stolen from their neighbour Robert Giles, a salesman, in Hedge Row Islington by George and Ellen Waters in 1837. The case is interesting in that the two households were separated merely by a painted-over window, between the Water's parlour and Giles's kitchen, and a trapdoor between Giles' kitchen and the Waters' bedroom. It seemed that the pair had been creeping into Giles' house through the trapdoor for some time. Giles had spied the missing articles when he rubbed away some of the paint from the window and peered into the Waters' parlour (t18371127-109).

That chimney ornaments were owned by high and low was demonstrated by a case in April 1838 when Mary and Rowland Dobie were found guilty of stealing from the Irish Earl of

Charlemont. Amongst the stolen items found in their possession were two chimney ornaments worth two shillings (t18380402-1038). Both were transported for seven years.

Benjamin Hall, errand boy to jeweller John Sewell, stole items from his employer and took them home to his mother, Ann Hall (t18390408-1383). In an interesting exchange during the April 1839 hearing, it was asked “Was there any appearance of poverty in the mother's lodging?” “I should say a great deal, though there were many things about the room that did not belong to them—the mantle shelf and table were full of China ornaments.”

The two pairs of ornaments worth 1/6 stolen from the china and glass shop of Jacob Bowling in St Pancras High Street on 1st June 1839 by Frederick Abbott ended up broken after a chase (t18390617-1826).

Francis Roberts tried desperately to jettison the possessions he'd stolen from Elizabeth Davis in April 1840 (t18400406-1214), throwing them away as he ran up Stanhope Street chased by Mrs Davis. His loot had included two china ornaments worth a shilling, which appear to have survived. Even houses of “ill fame” had ornaments, though not particularly valuable ones. Two, worth two pence, were mentioned in a September 1840 case (t18400914-2363) involving a drunken fracas that took place in Sun Court, King David Lane Shadwell.

Having been accused of stealing a number of objects, including four ornaments worth four shillings, from Isaac Day, who owned a beer shop in Greenwich Road (t18410104-559), John Oakley told the court that “in August, 1839, I was in Calcutta; I went raving mad, and was in the mad-house there; I was brought home to the London Dock in July last, and was given to

the Thames police; I escaped, and got on board various ships, to try to get service; I was at the North Pole public-house, and this derangement came over me." His defence (the court was told that he had deserted from the army twice) was not accepted, and he was transported for seven years.

The hazards of letting out furnished accommodation were underlined in several cases. In November 1841 William Smith, 21, was transported for ten years, having been found guilty of stealing property from a rented room in Edwards Yard, Langham Place (t18411129-183). As well as cutting an oil painting from its frame and stealing bedding, Smith and his accomplice Mary Davis took two ornaments worth £1/5/0 from the front sitting room.

Nine chimney ornaments worth 1 shilling November 1841 (t18411129-233); April 1842, two ornaments worth six pence (t18420404-1204). Robert Beard: "I hope you will be merciful; I was under the influence of liquor; I have been in great distress of late." Three ornaments valued at one shilling February 1843 (t18430227-1010) stolen from master Mary Holland, 16, a servant paid 1/- a week. May 1843, two chimney ornaments valued at one shilling (t18430508-1649); February 1844, Samuel Mullett was found not guilty of stealing property, including four chimney ornaments (including two china greyhounds) valued at 15 shillings from Samuel Smith an omnibus proprietor (t18440205-751); March 1844, two china dogs valued at one shilling (t18440304-837) stolen from Somerstown shoemaker Peter Crocker; three china ornaments valued at 15 shillings stolen from the bar parlour mantelpiece of a beer shop in Burdet Street, Westminster Road, Lambeth, February 1846 (t18460223-779); July 1846, nine china ornaments worth ten shillings from the shop of William Perry, Cumberland Row Newington (t18460706-1479); a model of a church worth ten shillings, two

pairs of ornaments August 1846 worth two shillings from a merchant's clerk living in Whitehorse Terrace (t18460817-1643); two china (chimney?) ornaments worth £1 and one chimney ornament worth 5 shillings from Henry Dewsbury, Upper Gore Kensington (t18460921-1930); June 1847, three mantelpiece ornaments valued at 6 pence stolen from Wilk Street Spitalfields (t18470614-1505); two bronzed ornaments valued at £2/5/0 from Joseph Muller a curiosity-dealer October 1848 (t18481023-2326);

Eleanor White, found not guilty February 1852 of the murder of her daughter lived in the front parlour of William Hathaway a French polisher Phoenix Place Somerstown (t18520202-254). Paid 2/3 per week, worked washing and charring "there were four chairs, a table, a box, a teakettle, a fender, a pair of tongs, a few ornaments, and a flock bed in the room"; (t18520405-393) April 1852 lodgers steal ornaments on mantelpiece; (t18570615-713) 15th June 1857 Harriet Bishop Ashby Street, St Pancras: "I had been out selling some fire ornaments, to help to get a living, for he had been out of work for a fortnight": Henry Ward Bishop: "we have been married fourteen years, to my sorrow; wherever I am at work this woman comes and annoys me" "I have been obliged to walk through the country over and over again through this woman, and no longer ago than last Thursday she said she would never sleep till she saw me out of the country".

May 1867 Stephen Samuel Wales Prince of Wales Crescent Haverstock Hill set fire to his home for insurance (t18670506-507) "the furniture was very good indeed—it was ordinary furniture—the stock consisted principally of clothes, chimney ornaments, bronze statuettes, a few watches, and a little mosaic jewellery".

July 1875 (t18750712-488) William Smith breaking and entering Kent House Villas, Lower Sydenham “the images which were in the drawing-room were figures of the four seasons—they were old Bow china, and—are worth 20l. a piece” “NATHANIEL BARNES . I am manager to Mr. Leo, pawnbroker, of 49, Stanhope Street—on Saturday, 15th May, the prisoner brought me four china figures which he wished to pledge for 10s.—I said “-Who do they belong to?”—he said they were given to his wife by her mother—I said “Well, what will you take for them?”—he said “What will you give for them?”—I said “I will give you 2l.—he gave the name of William—Smith, 63, Stanhope Street—the same day I saw them in the pawnbroker's list, and I gave information to the police—on 2nd June the prisoner came again with this figure (produced) and wanted me to buy it—I sent for the porter and gave him into custody.”

October 1879 (t18791020-972) “I noticed that the ornaments on the mantelshelf had been recently removed, by dust marks where they had been, and also on the sideboard” “this doll and purse were found upstairs, and these three jugs and this brush in the kitchen—they are the same description of articles as we give away with our tea”.

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