

PALL MALL GAZETTE

VOL. 2 - No. 1

THE HERITAGE of FLEET STREET

LONDON 2021

The Pall Mall Gazette was a London evening paper founded in 1865 under the editorship of Francis Greenwood. Its name was taken from a fictional newspaper which appears in the novel *The History of Pendennis* by Thackeray, where it is described as a “written by gentlemen for gentlemen”.

In 1880, a new owner wished to change the political stance of the paper, and the editor resigned in 1883.

W.T. Stead then took over as editor and changed the paper to reflect his ideas and social concerns. Paragraphs were in a readable style and shorter and had banner headlines and maps, diagrams and pictures to break up the text. His campaigns for reform made him and the paper famous and increased circulation. An early campaign against child prostitution was later published in *Pall Mall Extra* as “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon”. An attack on slum housing resulted in new legislation. “The Truth about the Navy” induced the government to start a major modernisation programme. Other campaigns included “Fight or Arbitrate: How should we settle the Afghan frontier”, “Who is to have the Sudan – Gordon or the slave traders?”

His most famous campaign was against child prostitution, which was then very prevalent in London, and had a flourishing export

arm where young girls were exported to the Continent. A bill to raise the age of consent from 13 to 16 was going through Parliament, but was facing defeat. Stead worked with the Salvation Army and feminist organisations to document and publicise the details of the trade. He thought the general public were unaware of how prevalent it was, and that it would not exist without a pool of rich customers prepared to pay good money to patronise brothels.

THE QUEEN'S SECLUSION.

A LITTLE paragraph appeared in the newspapers lately, to revive a hope which was to have been fulfilled to-day, and has not. “We are informed that Her MAJESTY the QUEEN will open Parliament “in person next session:” this was the little paragraph—printed, too, in that authoritative large type which carries conviction straight into the minds of most newspaper readers. But somehow the herald who brought such good tidings from Court was little credited. The trumpet sounded—that we all heard; but no confirming echo answered it—not even in those hollow places in our own hearts where dwells the hope of what we much desire. The most timid inquirer hesitated to believe; and he whose faith in editorial announcements had hitherto been complete, found himself disturbed by a strangely courageous scepticism. Was the announcement authorized at all by any one? Had we not been told of journalists and politicians who endeavoured to achieve what they wished by declaring it already certain? These questions were asked by many people. The answer to the first one is that the QUEEN never at any moment intended to open Parliament this session—(here is our own authoritative large type to prove it)—and to the other, that if the trick was played, it was a trick which only a very few philosophers can muster morality enough to condemn. There may be some politicians of the fermentative platform kind who secretly rejoice that (if tried) it did not succeed, but they are not philosophers.

He decided that the bill could not be allowed to fail, and arranged to buy a 13-year old child from the alcoholic mother for £5. The public outcry resulted in the successful passage of the bill in 1885, and the publicity from this campaign drove circulation up to new heights, even though some distributors refused to handle these issues. But it also resulted in Stead losing his job; Stead was arrested for “unlawful taking of a child” and sent to prison for three months. This was one of the first examples of investigative journalism.

The paper’s circulation declined under successive editors, apart from a brief recovery from 1911-14, and it was eventually absorbed into the *Evening Standard* in 1923.

George Bernard Shaw got his first job in journalism with the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Among other eminent people contributed to the paper were Anthony Trollope, Friedrich Engels, Oscar Wilde, and Robert Louis Stevenson.



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Additional notes

Source: Fleet Street: 500 years of the Press, D Griffiths, British Library, 2006

Prepared by: PN, 2022

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Additional notes