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## *The Swinging [17]60s*

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Until the twenty-first century era – in which we find ourselves buying dildos from the local pharmacy, studying the ‘news’ on Page 3 and teaching our children *A is for Apple, B for Banana and C is for... Condoms!* – the previous moral nadir of British society was most definitely the first half of the eighteenth century; it has taken us three centuries to descend by degrees into a similarly deep and dark hole from hell. In 1700 British (and especially English) society was in a moral quagmire from which it did not begin to show the first signs of emerging until the 1770s. The reasons for the state of society in the early 1700s were many and complex<sup>1</sup> but broadly speaking the essence of the root-causes resided in a cultural and spiritual rejection of the Puritan ethics which had prevailed in the previous century (and which had peaked during the rule of Oliver Cromwell).

Following the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, King Charles II and his Court spearheaded a knee-jerk purge of Puritanism from society in which Puritans were flushed out of positions of influence and especially from prominence in the Church of England. King Charles II (1630-1685) was promiscuous and had many mistresses but only ten years before his coronation, as an indication of how seriously the puritan dominated authorities that preceded him took sexual immorality in the mid-seventeenth century, consider the following entry from an 1803 compilation of *Journals of the House of Commons*;<sup>2</sup> it is recorded that on the 12th April 1650 it was resolved: “That in case any married woman shall be carnally known by any man other than her husband, except in case of ravishment [ie rape] ... every such offence shall be and is hereby adjudged felony, and every person, as well the man as the woman, shall suffer death, as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy.”

Indeed King Charles II was the figurehead for a rejection of Christian purity and his subjects followed his lead into hedonism and decadence. Six years after the death of Charles, in an indication of how British society was shaping up as it approached the dawn of the eighteenth century, the *Journals of the House of Commons* record that on the 25th November 1691 parliamentarians were resolved: “That a Committee be appointed, to consider the best means for the ... suppressing of riotous living and debauchery.”

At the beginning of the eighteenth century then British society was plunging headlong into the abyss at the same time as the saving and civilising influence of the Church had been badly damaged as the Church had been effectively stripped of a generation of its most committed and able men, both clergy and lay members. A mood of madness and darkness was setting in at the same time as the voice of decency and sound order was hushed to a silent whisper. The ubiquitous iniquitous pastimes of society from the aristocrat to the labourer were drinking and gambling and whoring. Executions were

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<sup>1</sup> If anyone tells you social history is simple they’re either a liar or a propagandist!

<sup>2</sup> The *Journals of the House of Commons* are pre-Hansard potted accounts of parliamentary proceedings since 1547 by various writers, many of whom were MPs at the time.

public entertainment as was bear-baiting and cock-fighting. Slaves were traded. State lotteries consumed the populace. Eighteenth century Britain was a rotten and immoral society.

The English painter and engraver William Hogarth (1697-1764) captured the mood in one of his most memorable works *Gin Lane* (1751), which depicted how the availability of cheap gin led to serious social ills including parental neglect, poverty, starvation and suicide. First produced in the Netherlands, gin is a juniper flavoured alcoholic drink made by distilling a sludge of maize, malt or rye. The low price of corn in the eighteenth century contributed to gin mania in Britain, the consequences of which were so bad that Parliament brought in the Gin Acts of 1736 and 1751 which slashed consumption by three-quarters. And as popular as gin were girls of 'easy virtue', not least in the flesh but also in erotic engravings and illustrations reproduced as prints for the buying public; there was a strong streak of eroticism in much of Hogarth's work like the series of six engravings entitled *A Harlot's Progress* (1732), the first of which depicted a famous London 'bawd' (a brothel madam).

In *London in the Eighteenth Century* Sir Walter Besant wrote: "The coarseness prevalent in the eighteenth century, the gross indecency and ribaldry of its songs, of the daily and common talk, makes itself felt in the whole of its literature – in the plays, the poems, the essays, the novels ... the grossness belonged not only to the poor wretch of a harlot, but to all classes alike." The novel *Fanny Hill* (1748) – a celebration of debauchery and prostitution – exemplified the rotten heart of 18th century English society; its author was arrested in 1749 for corrupting the King's subjects and publication was forbidden on grounds of obscenity (until 1970) but illegal copies were published and distributed in private circles.

The BBC broadcast *Fanny Hill*, a 'period drama' based on the novel on BBC4 in 2007;<sup>3</sup> *Zoo* glamour-pornographic magazine<sup>4</sup> described it thus: "The BBC unveils its most X-rated show ever later this month. The 1700s-set *Fanny Hill* features full nudity, orgies and lesbian action, a far cry from the Beeb's previous successful costume dramas *Pride And Prejudice* and *Bleak House*. In the show, titular heroine Fanny (played by newcomer Rebecca Night – you'll be seeing a lot more of her, not that there'll be much more to see) is orphaned and forced to work in a brothel." It would seem that the theme of *Fanny Hill* resonates loud and clear in this generation.

Eighteenth century London was awash with whores; by the end of the century Soho's whores had already laid the roots of a reputation so solid today. The diarist James Boswell was a prolific punter of prostitutes. Boswell's *London Journal 1762-1763*<sup>5</sup> detailed the many casual sexual encounters he had with women and young girls in the streets of London. Boswell wrote of intercourse with prostitutes whilst "in armour", that is wearing a sheath of some sort, perhaps made of leather or animal intestine. In addition to the many female prostitutes there was a much smaller and rather more clandestine band

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<sup>3</sup> First episode broadcast on 22.10.07.

<sup>4</sup> *Zoo* (no.191, October 2007) glamour-pornographic magazine.

<sup>5</sup> Edited by F.A. Pottle, London, 1950.

of male prostitutes in London (at a time when sodomy was a criminal offence which carried the death penalty). These boys for men were to be found in the city's handful of secretive homosexual brothels known as 'Sodomitical Clubs'; there was even one near the Old Bailey.

Taking up where Hogarth left off, in the latter half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth the brilliant cartoonists James Gillray (1757-1815) and Thomas Rowlandson (1757-1827) produced countless satirical cartoons and illustrations in which many of the women depicted wore few clothes or else were in a revealingly dishevelled state of undress. In particular the reputation of the English painter and illustrator Rowlandson, arguably the greatest caricaturist of the day, was established by his frequently lewd depictions of the vices and vanities of Georgian England. Lewd cartoons of scantily-clad girls were engraved and printed to be sold in large numbers by London street sellers and itinerant hawkers in provincial alehouses; it was the pornography of the era.

British eighteenth century depravity was mirrored in France; it was at this time that the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) wrote of his sexually perverse fondness of cruelty. His practices of inflicting pain and voyeuristic humiliation gave rise to our modern term for such deviant behaviour, namely 'sadism'. He was imprisoned for sexual offences and finally committed to an asylum; by his death in 1814 he had spent a total of twenty-seven years in prison or mental institutions. Eighteenth century French artists such as Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) and later Jean-Honore Fragonard (1732-1806) produced masterful works of art but which were unquestionably erotic in intent, and the French Rococo painter Francois Boucher (1703-1770) was well patronised for erotic works such as *Diana Bathing* (1742).

The historian J. Wesley Bready, acknowledged as an authority on eighteenth century England, described our lamentable national condition at this time in his book *England: Before and After Wesley* (1939)<sup>6</sup> thus: "...the trend of affairs was directed by materialism, self-seeking and blatant paganism in high places. The age was one of moral and spiritual eclipse." Bready quoted the considered opinion of eighteenth century Bishop Berkeley sermonising upon the state of the nation: "Our prospect is very terrible and the symptoms grow worse from day to day. ...youth born and brought up in wicked times without any bias to good from early principle, or instilled opinion, when they grow ripe, must be monsters indeed." Bready concluded: "The fact then of a phenomenal social and moral degeneracy at this period is indisputable."

### **The eighteenth century 'Great Awakening'**

But something happened quite unexpectedly which began to change the whole nature and tone of British society and which began to lead the nation in a radically different direction

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<sup>6</sup> Hodder and Stoughton, London.

to its previous course. In the middle of all the drinking, gambling, whoring, pornography and corruption of eighteenth century Britain, for want of a better way of putting it... God cropped up. In what proved to be a moral and spiritual watershed there came about what many historians refer to as the 'Great Awakening', an evangelical revival of Christian belief and practice which eventually transformed every aspect of British society and culture and by extension that of the whole English-speaking world (at a time when Britain was creeping towards becoming a great power over a global empire).

Just as the Industrial Revolution was born in the eighteenth century so too there was a spiritual revolution and the two most celebrated men in its vanguard were Christian evangelists George Whitefield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791). From 1739 until his death Whitefield preached the gospel – that is to say he told people about Jesus Christ – in just about every town and city throughout England, Scotland and Wales; Wesley was also an accomplished preacher and gifted in organising others in the formation of lots of new local churches. The message was straightforward, emphasising the reality of both sin and righteousness, and it rigorously reaffirmed the core Christian standards found only in the Bible as the one authoritative source for instruction and inspiration in all matters moral and spiritual. Many people responded to the evangelical message that they heard and as they then told others the movement mushroomed. The transforming power of the British evangelical revival that was the Great Awakening of the second half of the eighteenth century was attested to by J.R. Green in his *Short History of the English People*: “The Church was restored to new life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave-trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education.”

Regarding sex, the major theme of this book, the consequence of the Great Awakening was that by the end of the period known as the Regency (1811-1820) – and certainly by the time of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in 1837 – there was a definite and overwhelming consensus in the hearts of the British people that accepted only Christian Biblical moral standards as being right in matters of sex. These standards – these Christian *virtues* – were encapsulated in words such as 'chastity', 'chivalry', 'purity', 'modesty', 'decency' and 'fidelity' and the ideal standard of sexual conduct was held to be “chastity before marriage and fidelity within.” That is not of course to say that everybody lived by this standard because some did not but it was virtually unanimously acknowledged as the standard by which men and women ought to live. At the beginning of Victoria's reign Christian sexual morality was the prevailing orthodoxy which virtually no-one seriously disputed as the only standard acceptable in a civilised society and which all should publicly affirm and personally strive for. And in that most practical of regards, many did abide faithfully by the principle of not having pre-marital or extra-marital sex; for this majority of the population sex was had only between each husband and wife.

Perhaps the most visually obvious example of the change in moral standards stemming from the Great Awakening which began in the second half of the eighteenth century and which had markedly taken effect by the 1830s was that of the modesty of women's dress. For example during the Regency (1811-1820), as the paintings and illustrations of the period bear witness, the fashion trend for gentry ladies' dress was known as 'empire style' which referred to long flowing dresses with artificially high 'waistlines' of ribbons immediately below the breasts and 'necklines' which exposed almost all the breasts and cleavage with only the nipples barely covered. Furthermore 'empire style' dresses were typically made of a delicate muslin fabric and worn without any undergarments meaning that – quite apart from the substantial display of bosom – even where a woman's body was covered, very little was left to the imagination. However within a decade, as modesty of dress became the most immediate mark of every woman's publicly-assumed sexual purity and a foundation of her good reputation, female fashions became uniformly more modest with higher necklines, larger skirts and more undergarments. By the beginning of Victoria's reign in 1837 and henceforth for many decades most women's fashions comprised full-length dresses with even the shoulders covered by a high neckline; Victorian fashions purposefully guarded women's modesty and women took care neither to dress nor to act in a manner that might've been deemed even in the slightest sexually provocative. Writing in the 1870s at the 'high water mark' of Christian moral influence the novelist Charlotte Mary Yonge expressed the prevailing standard in *Womankind* (1876)<sup>7</sup> that: "...exposure is always wrong; whatever be the fashion, it is the Christian woman's duty<sup>8</sup> to perceive when indecency comes in and to protest against it by her own example."

### **The Victorians**

In *Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51* (1988)<sup>9</sup> author J.F.C. Harrison wrote: "Victorian values (in the true sense of the word) are really Wesley's values, which are Christian values." Victorian Britain's moral foundations were firmly laid down during the spiritual Great Awakening that arose in the 1760-1800 generation and which carried through into and matured in the 1800-1840 generation. The early Victorian period was characterised by a strong growth in the influence of authentic Christianity in society and the whole Victorian period was unashamedly Christian. Evangelicalism was the core ingredient in the everyday common-sense ideology of British Victorian society; evangelicalism was the orthodoxy of mindset in which the vast majority of people's moral assumptions and attitudes functioned. From family to local community to national life the Bible was the moral compass of the nation. Furthermore many Victorians [rightly] believed Britain's greatness including its social, economic and political affairs and its role as head and heart of Empire was attributable to Christian foundations; Britain truly was *Great Britain* when it was a Christian nation. The breadth of evangelicalism underpinning the Victorian

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<sup>7</sup> Published in London.

<sup>8</sup> Written in 1876 the phrase "the Christian woman's duty" in effect meant 'every woman's duty'.

<sup>9</sup> Fontana Press, London.

British nation is also clear when one considers evangelicalism's successful victory over the worst excesses of preceding aristocratic hedonism on the left hand and on the right hand its preventive guidance of the masses away from the revolutionary mob violence that consumed France a generation before.

Throughout the Victorian age the majority of the British people belonged to and actively participated in a local church, or at least attended Sunday services on a regular basis. Sunday Schools were very significant in the spread of the Christian Gospel message and evangelical morality; most children went regularly and were taught to be obedient, respectful and morally virtuous. The Sunday Sabbath day was observed by all and so – unlike now – Sunday was a day like no other. As W.J. Reader wrote in *Life in Victorian England* (1964)<sup>10</sup>: "...that unquestionable standards of right and wrong were generally held to exist, backed by the force of established authority, was an immense support to many people..."

We can see then that the Victorians had a clear consensus regarding what attitudes and behaviour was right or wrong based upon the Biblical Christian standard. A majority of the population believed they ought to live by Biblical standards and aspired to do so. Marriage was taken very seriously and divorce was unheard of; marriage was popularly understood to be a sacramental lifelong union. This belief that marriage was for life was widely accepted as essential to a civilised and well-ordered society – divorce didn't even enter the thoughts of the ordinary citizen, much less actually happen. Chastity and fidelity were the order of the day. It was widely accepted that sex outside of marriage was wrong and in practice it was unusual, as evidenced by the fact that throughout the second half of the nineteenth century the broad national rate of illegitimate births remained under 5%! For an unmarried couple to openly live together was unthinkable and condemned in no uncertain terms as 'living in sin' and chastity was of such importance that no unmarried woman desired to do anything which might put her virginity and good reputation in any doubt. Pornography and homosexuality and abortion were as illegal as they were immoral. The idea of 'sex-educating' children was inconceivable.

In consideration of this Victorian 'sexual state of the nation' it begs the obvious question: How then did we arrive in our present condition so different to that of just 120 years ago? Quite simply the change that occurred between then and now does merit description as a 'revolution'. Though the 'sexual revolution' appeared to happen overnight in 1960 in reality it was a stealthy and gradual process of change in moral attitudes (and the law) and subsequently behaviour over several decades. Revolutions – whether sudden or gradual, hidden or obvious – always start with a set of ideas contrary to the established orthodoxy, and with a tiny number of radical individuals in whose minds those ideas are first

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<sup>10</sup> BT Batsford, London.

conceived – individuals so passionate about their ideas as to be hellbent not simply on thinking them but also on expressing them publicly to others, persuading others to agree with them and striving by any means to see their ideas become a new orthodoxy to replace the extant. These ideologues are usually ‘intellectuals’ with a university background, the so-called ‘intelligentsia’ (though their ideas are often far from intelligent). The sexual revolution began with a handful of ‘sexual revolutionaries’ whose ideas and efforts were the first step in destroying the Victorian order and replacing it with something rather different. The next chapter examines the darker side of Victorian life and also notes some of the key people who figured in the creation of the ideology of sexual revolt against the Victorian sexual status quo.