*Historical Research*, 2025, **XX**, 1–25
https://doi.org/10.1093/hisres/htaf018
Advance access publication 18 July 2025
**Original Article**

# Exhibiting Tommy Atkins: senses, spectacle and military modernity in late Victorian Britain

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**ABSTRACT**

This article considers the conjunction of senses, emotions and objects in the Royal Military Exhibition of 1890 to deepen our understanding of popular militarism in late Victorian Britain. Exhibitory culture was reaching its peak in this period in parallel with the rise of urban spectatorship, making both objects and people the subject of the gaze. Deploying the concepts of emotional objects and 'prosthetic feeling', we show that the uniquely modern, inter-sensory and immersive experience of the Royal Military Exhibition was central to shaping positive popular sentiment about the army at a time of profound technological, geopolitical and cultural change.

One fine summer's morning in 1890 two friends, Harold and Willy, meet with a cheery 'Halloo' on Cannon Street in London. 'Where are you bound for?' asks Willy, to which Harold replies, 'I was just thinking of going to the Exhibition'. 'Exhibition? What Exhibition?' Willy enquires. 'Why, the Military, of course!' Willy is sceptical: 'The Military? I am sure that won't be up to much'. 'Now, that just shows your ignorance, my friend', Harold retorts, explaining, 'I was present on the opening day, and can assure you that I have not often seen so nice and complete an Exhibition before'. Duly persuaded, Willy suggests they take the omnibus to Smith Street, a short walk from the Exhibition venue at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. Harold, however, proposes to go 'by water' although Willy complains that a boat journey would require them to 'get off at Pimlico or Battersea Park, and walk the remaining distance'. Once more, Harold is compelled to correct his friend's ignorance: 'That just shows how much you know about it … If I tell you that a temporary pier has been opened for the Exhibition season, which will land us almost in front of the principal entrance, I suppose you won't mind taking my advice for once, and come along to the Old Swan Pier'.[1]

[1] H. Hickman, *A Souvenir of the Royal Military Exhibition: London, 1890* (London, 1890), pp. 1–2.

Happily reconciled, the two friends stroll arm in arm to the pier where they purchase tickets for the *H.M. Stanley*, bound for Chelsea. Sitting on the deck and smoking cigars as the bright sunshine dances on the 'rippling waves of Father Thames', they arrive at the Exhibition Pier where a startled Willy exclaims 'Good gracious! What a surprise … Why, this looks like the entrance to a real Exhibition!' Nonplussed, Harold enquires, 'Well, what did you expect to find, then? "Why, simply one of those manifold bazaars we meet with nowadays"'. Sufficiently impressed, Willy purchases a double season ticket for both him and his wife on the promise of Harold standing him 'a nice little lunch at Spiers and Pond's'. 'Top, old Chappy', exclaims Willy, handing over a guinea and a half to enter '*the* show of the season'.[2]

We shall leave our men of leisure for now, as they disappear through the turnstile on Chelsea Embankment. This account of their visit is provided by Harold Hickman, author of the official *Souvenir of the Royal Military Exhibition*. Unlike other literary descriptions of the event, Hickman spends much of his time sampling the commercial products on display in the Trade Section and after consuming too many complimentary 'beef lozenges' becomes temporarily indisposed until a stallholder offers him a quinine lozenge that sets him right.[3] His focus on the Trade Section reflects the *Souvenir*'s agenda to promote those companies whose rental fees helped subsidize the event. But what it shares with all other such accounts is its deeply sensory, embodied and immersive description of the sights, smells and sounds of the exhibition, as well as the emotions that those experiences engendered. The use of the urban spectator as an avatar for reading audiences is similarly ubiquitous.

The Royal Military Exhibition of 1890 (hereafter R.M.E.) was two years in the making. It was conceived initially as a display of craft objects made by serving military personnel and their families to raise money for the Church of England Soldiers' Institutes. These offered opportunities for 'rational' recreation away from the 'coarse amusements' of the public house and 'second-rate music halls'.[4] However, the central committee of the R.M.E., directed by Major G. E. W. Malet, soon agreed that the exhibition's scope should be extended to include a 'Trade Section of objects connected with military life' as well as 'a special loan collection of military pictures, musical instruments, and relics'. Moreover, during the planning stages many of the local committees set up to assist held 'preliminary Exhibitions … which embraced not only industrial work of soldiers, but gymnastic and athletic apparatus'. This combination of historic, commercial and craft objects with displays of military bodily proficiency became the model for the R.M.E. A resounding success, it ran from May to November 1890, attracted almost a million visitors, with daily attendance peaking at 21,400 on the May Bank Holiday, and realized a profit of nearly £10,000.[5]

Although the exhibition was well attended and extensively covered in the press, its significance has yet to be considered by historians, whether those interested in the British army or in exhibition culture itself. This contrasts with the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891, which was directly inspired by the success of the R.M.E., and took place at the same venue in Chelsea (despite the more obvious historical link with Greenwich).[6] Such relative historical neglect mirrors late Victorian official and public investment in the Royal Navy compared to the army. Although both services lobbied for additional funding from the 1880s onwards, the navy almost always did so from a position of greater strength and sympathy.[7] Malet himself, in linking the two events, stated that 'we are, as we ought to be, proud of our Army; but England is a maritime nation, and we are still prouder of our Navy as the senior Service'. Even so, he saw both as doing similar kinds of work in sustaining the British military project through a direct appeal to the public. 'We may well argue', he claimed, 'that … both [exhibitions] will be long remembered, not only as places of amusement, but also of information in all

[2] Hickman, *Souvenir*, pp. 2, 10–11.
[3] Hickman, *Souvenir*, pp. 44–6.
[4] *United Service Magazine* (hereafter *U.S.M.*), new ser., iv (Oct. 1891–March 1892), p. 167; *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1890, p. 6; and Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 3.
[5] *Royal Military Exhibition, 1890: Official Catalogue and Guide* (London, 1890), pp. xvii–xviii; *Royal Military Exhibition, 1890: Official Report of the Honorary Director* (London, 1891), pp. 13, 29; and *U.S.M.*, new ser., iv (Oct. 1891–March 1892), p. 168.
[6] For the Royal Naval Exhibition, see P. van der Merwe, 'Views of the Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891', *Journal for Maritime Research*, iii (2001), 146–56; and W. G. Lewis-Jones, '"Displaying Nelson": navalism and "the Exhibition" of 1891', *International Journal of Maritime History*, lxii (2005), 29–67. For contemporary complaints about the appropriateness of the venue, see *Sporting Gazette*, 20 Sept. 1890, p. 1316.
[7] Van der Merwe, 'Views', pp. 146–7.

naval and military matters which have combined to place the Empire of Great Britain in the foremost place amongst the nations of the earth.'[8]

There has been great debate over the last forty years about the extent to which Victorian and Edwardian Britain was characterized by a widely diffused culture of imperialism and militarism. Scholars such as Anne Summers and John MacKenzie have suggested that the imagery and ideology of militarism and imperialism saturated British society, especially during the fervid era of 'New Imperialism' (*c.*1870–1914).[9] On the other hand, Bernard Porter's revisionist account maintains that empire found little imaginative traction with the British public outside a of narrow clique and barely impacted the working class.[10] Much of this scholarship conflates militarism with imperialism. This is commonsensical insofar as the army, together with the navy, provided a key strategic instrument for defending and extending British colonial interests. However, this approach obscures what might be distinctive about the cultural profile of the army outside of exclusively imperial concerns. Richard Fulton's more recent study considers the prevalence of militaristic sentiment among the later nineteenth-century British 'lower orders' but draws the somewhat incongruous conclusion that the vast crowds who celebrated victory at the Battle of Omdurman in September 1898 were simultaneously intensely warlike and largely unmoved by the ideology of militarism.[11]

We maintain that late Victorian Britain *can* be regarded as broadly militaristic, defined, among other things, by popular veneration of the army and the diffusion of military values through civil society. As historians have demonstrated, the mechanisms for inculcating such values in the public included literary texts, music hall songs and other elements of popular culture.[12] In 2015 MacKenzie suggested that work on popular imperialism had largely ignored materiality and display.[13] Since then, however, there has been a flowering of scholarship on the cultural politics of imperial collecting and the complex role of the army in the acquisition of non-European artefacts.[14] We intend to build on this literature by exploring the combined role of objects and performance in shaping the popular perception of the British army.

As Alfred Vagts demonstrates, militarism is defined in large part by pageantry and spectacle, whose primary purpose is to promote the very *idea* of the military.[15] We therefore seek to investigate not only the material dimensions of militarism, but also the affective impact on those who encountered them.[16] In his contemporary critique of popular imperialism, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (1901), J. A. Hobson coined the suggestive phrase 'spectatorial passions' to describe the process by which acts of looking and imaginative projection promoted and sustained an *emotional* engagement with military and imperial endeavour.[17] Although Hobson's arguments have been critiqued, we are inspired by his

[8] *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* (hereafter *J.R.U.S.I.*), xxxv (1891), p. 658.

[9] A. Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, ii (1976), 104–23. For examples of MacKenzie's extensive scholarship, see J. M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Popular Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984); and J. M. MacKenzie, 'Introduction: popular imperialism and the military', in *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, ed. J. M. MacKenzie (Manchester, 1992), pp. 1–24.

[10] B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004).

[11] R. Fulton, *Warrior Generation, 1865–1885: Militarism and British Working-Class Boys* (London, 2020).

[12] MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*; *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. J. M. MacKenzie (Manchester, 1986); G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994); M. Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000* (London, 2000); and S. Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism, and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds* (Basingstoke, 2002).

[13] J. M. MacKenzie and J. McAleer, 'Introduction: cultures of display and the British Empire', in *Exhibiting Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire*, ed. J. M. MacKenzie and J. McAleer (Manchester, 2015), 1–17, at p. 2. For a notable exception to this general trend, see D. Mayer, 'The world on fire … pyrodramas at Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester, c.1850–1950', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism*, pp. 179–97.

[14] *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire*, ed. H. Lidchi and S. Allan (Manchester, 2020). The work of Nicole M. Hartwell is particularly important here. See N. M. Hartwell, 'A repository of virtue? The United Services Museum, colleting, and the professionalization of the British Armed Forces, 1829–1864', *Journal of the History of Collections*, xxxi (2019), 77–91; N. M. Hartwell, 'Framing colonial war loot: the "captured" *Spoila Opima* of Kunwar Singh', *Journal of the History of Collections*, xxxiv (2022), 287–301; and H. Lidchi and N. M. Hartwell, 'Colonial collections in British military museums: of objects, materiality, and sentiment', in *Museums, Societies, and the Creation of Value*, ed. H. Morphy and R. McKenzie (Abingdon, 2022), pp. 63–80.

[15] A. Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Civilian and Military* (New York, 1959), pp. 13–17. For a useful overview of the historiography on militarism in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, see C. K. Melby, 'Rethinking British militarism before the First World War: the case of "An Englishman's Home" (1909)', *English Historical Review*, cxxxvii (2023), 1377–401.

[16] The sentimental aspects of military objects have been noted in Lidchi and Hartwell, 'Colonial collections'.

[17] J. A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London, 1901), pp. 9–12; MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 11; and J. M. MacKenzie, 'Passion or indifference? Popular imperialism in Britain: continuities and discontinuities over two centuries', in *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Italy*, ed. J. M. MacKenzie (Manchester, 2011), pp. 57–89, at pp. 57–8.

concept of 'spectatorial passions' to explore the ways in which popular militarism was, at least in part, generated through an emotional response to materiality, spectacle and experience, notably, in the case of this article, that most quintessential expression of Victorian modernity, the exhibition.

Following the Great Exhibition of 1851, these phenomena exploded across Britain, Europe and North America. By the 1880s 'an atmosphere of megalomania' surrounded exhibitions as they grew in scale and frequency, reaching their peak in the huge international expositions that marked the fin de siècle.[18] In Britain the 1880s saw almost yearly exhibitions including those concerned with medicine, fishing, mining, electricity and, perhaps most notably, the colonies. Scholars have largely focused on their commercial and imperial dimensions, which were the common drivers of these extravagant events. Their educational function for the masses was fetishized, yet their crowds were increasingly attracted through the medium of entertainment. The R.M.E. capitalized on the popularity and form of these events, although, in comparison with other national exhibitions and international expositions, it was praised for its small scale.[19] While easier to cover in one day, the R.M.E. nonetheless shared the spectacular dimensions of international expositions, which offered, in Greenhalgh's words, a mixture of 'carnival and ceremony, of circus and museum, popularism and elitism'.[20]

Military spectacle had a long history, and some exhibitions incorporated military parades to attract visitors. As Scott Myerly has shown, stand-alone nineteenth-century military-style public entertainments such as reviews, evolutions of drill, cannon salutes and military bands could also draw huge crowds. However, the shifting role of public military spectacle as part of a wider exhibitory culture remains to be examined.[21] This is surprising, as the R.M.E. marked a significant escalation in the presence of the army within this culture, such that by 1899 the Greater Britain Exhibition at Earl's Court in London could include an ostensibly entertaining re-enactment of extreme colonial violence by British troops.[22] As we shall show, the conjunction of exhibitory and military cultures evident in the R.M.E. promoted and shaped popular militarism through its sensory, material and emotional power.

Exhibitions were a product of urban modernity, events that harnessed new patterns of spectatorial consumption that were rooted in the emerging metropolises of Europe and North America.[23] A significant scholarship has been devoted to the figure of the *flaneur*, typically an elite man whose perambulations through the streets enabled him to visually savour both the shifting built environment and its inhabitants, especially those whom he socially and ethnically othered.[24] This approach is central to our analysis; following Sadiah Qureshi, however, we reconfigure the *flaneur* as the urban spectator, a more inclusive construction that acknowledges the diversity of gazes at work in the modern city.[25] Traditionally, the urban spectator was conceived as a detached observer, vicariously consuming their environment and its inhabitants. Now, however, historians are sensitive to the intersubjective aspects of urban viewing.[26] We seek to develop this approach by highlighting the ways in which exhibitory spectatorship could involve both a self-conscious, even ironic, detachment and a deep sensory and emotional engagement with the objects of the gaze. As we will show, this voyeuristic emotional engagement was perhaps at its most resonant when the objects and artefacts on display were those of the military, historians having long recognized the broader 'pleasure cultures' attendant on the cultural consumption of war in this period.[27]

[18] P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: the Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988), p. 15.

[19] *Baily's Monthly Magazine* (hereafter *B.M.M.*), 1 Aug. 1890, pp. 137–8.

[20] Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, pp. 5, 12, 18, 21. For a contemporary expression of this in relation to the R.M.E., see *B.M.M.*, 1 Aug. 1890, p. 137.

[21] Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, p. 5; and S. Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars Through the Crimea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), pp. 139–42.

[22] M. Brown, 'Cold steel, weak flesh: mechanism, masculinity and the anxieties of late Victorian empire', *Cultural and Social History*, xiv (2017), 155–81, at p. 168.

[23] For exhibitions and urban modernity, see K. Hill, '"Olde worlde" urban? Reconstructing historic urban environments at exhibitions, 1884–1908', *Urban History*, xlv (2018), 306–30. For spectatorial consumption, see S. Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 2011), ch. 1. For London as an icon of modernity, see K. Boehm and J. McDonagh, 'Introduction', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, xv (2010), 194–200.

[24] R. Allen, 'Munby reappraised: the diary of an English flaneur', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, v (2000), 260–86.

[25] Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, p. 16.

[26] Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, pp. 30, 34; Allen, 'Munby reappraised', pp. 273, 275; and Boehm and McDonagh, 'Introduction', p. 199.

[27] Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*; Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*; and Paris, *Warrior Nation*.

In our reconstruction of the emotional and material 'sense-scape' of the R.M.E., we recognize, as Rob Boddice and Mark Smith assert, that 'historical experience was constructed out of situated feelings', and that scholars should 'braid' the emotions and senses together to recover the past in all its richness.[28] In this article, we aim for a fundamentally inter-sensory analysis that recognizes the ways in which senses work together to elicit emotional states of being.[29] Our research employs the concept of emotional objects, recognizing that 'things' have agency, provoking and conveying powerful emotional responses.[30] Indeed, our approach is *inter-material*, since we are concerned with the interaction of spaces, objects and people.[31] Patrick Joyce has argued that the modern liberal city was remarkable for its 'omnioptic' qualities, or 'the many viewing the many', and the act of observing both objects and people in conjunction was a primary pleasure of the R.M.E.[32] As one writer remarked, 'Visitors to the Military Exhibition [could be] more interesting … than the Exhibition itself'.[33]

As such, we argue that the exhibition was a peculiarly modern, immersive phenomenon, providing a unique environment for the generation and assimilation of feelings about the military. Here, we are inspired by Alison Landsberg's concept of 'prosthetic memory', the process by which the commodified cultures of mass media encourage a collective memory of historical events of which people have no direct experience.[34] We propose an analogous concept of 'prosthetic feeling', whereby the immersive experience of the R.M.E. facilitated an emotional attachment to the British army that was distinctively modern and detached from immediate personal experience. Thereby, we conceive of popular militarism as not merely produced through the dissemination and reception of cultural artefacts such as texts and images, but also through situated commercial, material and embodied experiences.

We acknowledge that our reconstruction of the R.M.E.'s experiential sense-scape must, by necessity, be mediated, since it is derived from textual descriptions and illustrations in contemporary newspapers, periodicals, books, pamphlets and promotional material. However, as we have suggested, what is remarkable about such accounts is that they almost universally take the form of a virtual tour in which the writer records their responses to their sensory environment. The structure of our article mimics this perambulatory mode, exploring the exhibition as it was experienced, imagined and represented by contemporaries. Given the nature of our sources, most of which were written and consumed by the middle classes, it is difficult to know how far these emotional experiences were shared by working-class audiences. The Wednesday admission fee of 2*s* 6*d* was standard for a major event of the time but was probably out of the reach of those from the lowest social strata.[35] On other days, the admission fee was 1*s* and this was made the universal daily rate from late August onwards.[36] Moreover, soldiers in uniform paid only 3*d* and there is ample evidence of visitors from working-class backgrounds, particularly enlisted men and their families. Additionally, opening hours were soon extended to 11 p.m. (on Wednesdays only from mid May then every day from late June), which may have provided opportunities for manual labourers to visit outside of working hours.[37] Even so, accounts of such visitors typically made them the focus of a middle-class gaze rather than constituting them as speaking subjects and, as such, we can only make tentative claims for the universality of our findings. Nonetheless, historical scholarship has demonstrated that skilled industrial workers were often 'knowledgeable and active participants in exhibitions', and the same appears to have been true of the R.M.E.[38]

[28] R. Boddice and M. Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 2–3.
[29] W. Tullett, 'State of the field: sensory history', *History*, cvi (2021), 804–20, at p. 809.
[30] S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London, 2004); L. T. Ulrich and others, *Tangible Things: Making History Through Objects* (Oxford, 2015); and *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History*, ed. S. Downes, S. Holloway and S. Randles (Oxford, 2018).
[31] C.f. Hill, '"Olde world" urban?'.
[32] P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), pp. 16, 147–8.
[33] *Illustrated London News* (hereafter *I.L.N.*), 7 June 1890, p. 724.
[34] A. Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, 2004), pp. 2, 8, 16, 18, 20. See also Hill, '"Olde worlde" urban?', pp. 313–14.
[35] C.f. Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, p. 273.
[36] *I.L.N.*, 6 Sept. 1890, p. 317.
[37] The National Archives of the U.K., HO 45/9816/B7805: Entertainments, Royal Military Exhibition 1890, music licence issued by secretary of state; *I.L.N.*, 7 June 1890, p. 733; 19 July 1890, p. 93; and *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), 652. For an equivalent practice, see Mayer, 'World on fire', pp. 180–3.
[38] C. Jones, 'The nineteenth-century industrial worker as exhibition visitor: ways of engaging with making', *Journal of Modern Craft*, xv (2022), 167–80, at p. 178.

Our article is divided into four sections. Firstly, we provide some context for understanding the place of the army in British society and culture in 1890. The following sections then explore the experience of the exhibition itself, using three overlapping themes: sensory spaces, emotional objects and embodied performances.

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To appreciate the significance of the R.M.E. it is necessary to understand why the British army may have wanted to sell itself to the public in 1890. A lot has been written on the army and its relationship to Victorian society, much of it concerned with the impact of reform from the 1860s onwards.[39] The granular details of these reforms need not concern us here, suffice it to say that outcry over the army's indifferent performance in the Crimean War initiated an organizational overhaul that effectively created a 'new army'. These reforms, directed by the war office, came in two waves, the first overseen by Edward Cardwell from 1868 to 1874, the second by Hugh Childers in 1881. Cardwell's reforms abolished the purchase of officers' commissions, encouraging promotion by merit, ended flogging as a punishment, and put a stop to 'bounty money', whereby recruiting sergeants were offered a financial inducement to enlist men. Cardwell also tied regiments to geographical districts, intending to foster better relations with the public. This was extended by Childers, who abolished the numbering of regiments by seniority, linking them both nominally and practically to a regional depot.[40]

These changes were not without their critics; the abolition of numbering by seniority, together with the standardization of uniforms, angered those who guarded regimental traditions jealously.[41] However, by far the most contentious aspect of these reforms was the introduction in 1870 of what was known as 'short service'. Up to this point, soldiers had enlisted for between twelve and twenty-one years. Britain thus had a small volunteer army stocked with well-experienced men but was lacking a reserve of trained manpower to call on in times of national emergency, such as Prussia had with the *Landwehr*. To facilitate a similar force, Cardwell reduced the minimum term of enlistment to six years 'with the Colours' followed by a further seven years in the reserve. Although the system underwent some revision, the issue of short service dominated discussions of military efficiency and preparedness throughout the following decades. Opponents claimed that the system encouraged the enlistment of working-class 'boys' under the age of twenty who, because they were not yet fully physically developed, were customarily exempted from foreign service, particularly in India, meaning that battalions sent abroad could often ship out with a significantly reduced complement.[42] Such concerns only intensified as broader degenerative anxieties about the physical state of the British population took hold in the last two decades of the century.[43]

Hence, while it has been argued that reform increased the efficiency of the British army, and while there is little doubt that its *image* was much improved by 1890, the army continued to generate great debate, not least among its own officer corps.[44] Meanwhile, the rank and file were not immune from the turbulent labour relations of the era, for while reform served to ameliorate some of the harsher aspects of military life, serious discontent persisted about pay and conditions.[45] Indeed, at the height of the R.M.E., in July 1890, the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards, whose regiment had been employed in

[39] F. S. Allen, *The British Army, 1860–1900: a Study of the Cardwell Manpower Reforms* (Boston, Mass., 1960); G. Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (1977, repr. Abingdon, 2007); E. M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army, 1858–1902* (Manchester, 1992); D. French, *Military Identities: the Regimental System, the British Army and the British People, c.1870–2000* (Oxford, 2005); and E. Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins, War Office reform and the social and cultural presence of the late Victorian army in Britain, c.1868–1899' (unpublished University of Plymouth Ph.D. thesis, 2016).

[40] French, *Military Identities*, ch. 1; and Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins', section 1.

[41] See, e.g., *U.S.M.*, new ser., ii (Oct. 1890–March 1891), p. 400; and French, *Military Identities*, pp. 77–8, 85–6.

[42] W. Aitken, *The Growth of the Recruit and Young Soldier With a View to a Judicious Selection of 'Growing Lads' for the Army, and a Regulated System of Training for Recruits* (2nd edn., London, 1887), p. 47; and J. L. A. Simmons, 'The critical condition of the army', *Nineteenth Century*, xiv (1883), 165–88, at pp. 181–2.

[43] Brown, 'Cold steel'.

[44] On the image of the army, see Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins'; and E. Gosling, '"A soldier's life is a merry one", or, "A certain cure for gout and rheumatism": the shift in popular perceptions of the common soldier in late Victorian Britain, 1870–c.1910', in *Redcoats to Tommies: the Experience of the British Soldier From the Eighteenth Century*, ed. K. Linch and M. Lord (Woodbridge, 2021), pp. 169–91.

[45] N. Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth-Century Military* (Liverpool, 2016), ch. 4.

1887 to supress the 'Bloody Sunday' labour protests in Trafalgar Square, 'refused duty' over the heavy-handedness of their new commander and were sent on foreign service to Bermuda as a punishment.[46]

All this was taking place within a fraught strategic environment. The 1880s had initiated a military technological revolution, with the introduction of magazine-fed rifles firing smokeless, small-bore ammunition, and the advent of machine guns and quick-firing artillery. This had a profound impact on drill, discipline and tactics, and in 1890 the British army was in a transitional phase. It had recently introduced the Maxim gun and was soon to replace its brand-new black powder firing Lee-Metford rifles with the smokeless Lee-Enfield.[47] Not only was the army standing on the cusp of military modernity, but it was also facing grave new challenges. Since the Crimean War, much of its energy had focused on the protection and expansion of Britain's colonial territories. The previous decade had been especially notable in this regard, and conflicts such as the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), the First Anglo-Boer War (1880–1), and the Egyptian and Sudanese campaigns (1881–5) had been characterized by a mixture of ignominy and glory.

However, with the rise to power of the German empire, fears grew ever more pronounced about the prospect of a European-wide war, provoking questions about how Britain was supposed to face these dual threats with a professional army of less than 200,000 men. The R.M.E. thus took place at a vital juncture, when military matters were high in the public mind. As one correspondent noted:

> There are … two reasons why the British people are nowadays so keenly interested in warlike affairs. The newspapers are full of martial preparations which are daily being pushed forward on the Continent at a time when all Europe … resembles more than ever it did an armed camp. Then the science of war has become more highly organized – more widely developed – by the introduction of new weapons, new implements, and new methods.[48]

The R.M.E. embodied other preoccupations too. A large part of the army's cultural rehabilitation rested on the *moral* character of Tommy Atkins, rendering him respectable and useful beyond his function as cannon fodder. Philanthropic and missionary groups, as well as evangelical officers, strove to encourage enlisted men's religious observance and facilitate what Charles Dickens called their 'domestic relations'.[49] Notably, soldiers were exhorted to eschew the public house in favour of household responsibilities and skills, epitomized by the widespread practice of quilting.[50] These concerns were clearly evident in the R.M.E., which, as we have heard, was intended to support Soldiers' Institutes and was centred on the display and sale of their craft productions. But it was likewise evident in a broader emphasis on care for the solider that was epitomized by the popular 'Ambulance Display' of the Army Medical Department, and which reflected an ostensible interest in humanitarianism in military circles.[51] Nevertheless, as we shall see, ambivalences remained, including tensions between tradition and modernity, between empire and home, and between a sentimentalized domestication of the soldier and a growing fetishization of him as a warrior.

By 1890 high-Victorian paternalism was giving way to a more realist attitude towards Tommy Atkins, but the fact remained that his identity as a popularly adored hero was far from assured.[52] This much is evident from Rudyard Kipling's contemporary collection of songs and poems, *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1890), and it is notable that in promoting the R.M.E., the commander-in-chief of the army, the duke of Cambridge, invoked the duke of Wellington's notorious description of British soldiers as the 'scum of the earth'.[53] Likewise, in anticipation of the event, one literary wit declared, 'We are to be blessed with a military exhibition. Our modern soldiers are, alas! too prone to making an exhibition

[46] *Times*, 14 Nov. 1887, p. 6; 19 July 1890, p. 12; and *Sporting Gazette*, 26 July 1890, p. 1051.
[47] Brown, 'Cold steel', p. 169; and *I.L.N.*, 24 May 1890, pp. 658–9.
[48] *Sporting Gazette*, 30 May 1891, p. 745.
[49] Quoted in Fulton, *Warrior Generation*, p. 50.
[50] H. Furneaux, *Military Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch, and Masculinity in the Crimean War* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 176–84; and J. Begiato, *Manliness in Britain, 1760–1900: Bodies, Emotion, and Material Culture* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 114–20.
[51] M. Brown, 'Bloodshed', in *A Cultural History of Blood in the Age of Empire*, ed. J. Goode (London, forthcoming).
[52] Gosling, '"Soldier's life"'.
[53] *The Times*, 21 March 1890, p. 11.

of themselves'.[54] Clearly, the R.M.E. had work to do to instil a love for Tommy Atkins in the hearts of the metropolitan public.

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If, like Harold and Willy, you had travelled to the R.M.E. by steamboat you would have arrived at a specially built pier on Chelsea Embankment, which had itself been opened in 1874 as part of Joseph Bazalgette's grand scheme of public works.[55] This was not the only modern means of arrival, however; the railway companies issued combined travel and entrance tickets, and the exhibition was easily accessible from the mainline Grosvenor Road station, as well as Sloane Square and South Kensington stations on the District Railway.[56] The exhibition was located in the grounds of the Royal Hospital, which had been established in 1682 for the care of veteran soldiers.[57] As the *Saturday Review* commented, 'The site itself is connected with military traditions of much interest'.[58] By 1890 Chelsea was a somewhat peripheral 'ancient suburb'; once the haunt of artists and writers, it was disparagingly described by contemporaries as 'depressing and uncanny'. Nonetheless, the hospital itself held great appeal and it was hoped that the R.M.E. would 'draw London to it', as the International Fisheries Exhibition (1883) and International Health Exhibition (1884) had to South Kensington.[59] This conjunction of ancient and modern was evoked by several writers, often through the imaginative device of Eleanor 'Nell' Gwyn (1651?–1687), Charles II's lover, who was reputed to have played a key role in founding the hospital. *Punch*, for example, playfully turned her into an urban spectator; stepping down from her portrait in the Garrick Club, she walks the reader through a transformed London and, via a Thames steamer, to Chelsea, observing the crowds 'coming by rail, and boat, and omnibus'. 'Gad'sooks!', she exclaims, on seeing 'her hospital … brave with bunting' and with 'enormous sheds full of battle pictures and portraits … a huge band-stand' and 'electric light … laid on with great liberality in the gardens'.[60]

While a modestly sized exhibition, the R.M.E. still covered seven and a half acres, three and a half around Gordon House and the remainder in the grounds of Chelsea Hospital itself.[61] According to the catalogue, which was designed as a virtual guide to the exhibition, 'As we enter at the main Entrance on the Embankment, the park to the right is reserved for military sports, and for music in the grandstand, which is capable of holding 500 performers'. This area, to the south of the hospital gardens, also included a smaller bandstand, several refreshment kiosks, a dairy, a field bakery, a shooting gallery and a temporary roofed structure that housed the ambulance gallery.

As the catalogue notes, 'The buildings to the left and in front of us are devoted to the exhibition'.[62] From here the visitor passed into a series of temporary wooden buildings, comprising a space of 120,000 feet. First was the South Gallery, attached to which was a 'more substantial' annexe for the 'Battle Gallery' and a display of musical instruments. This led onto the West Gallery, with a second entrance from Tite Street, followed by the North Gallery and Gordon House itself, which also included a Grill Room and Dining Room. Thence the visitor would pass to the East Gallery, the longest of all.[63] These structures 'were arranged round the garden of Gordon House with an open verandah [*sic*] on the inner side, forming an irregular quadrangle, which was tastefully laid out as a garden with shrubberies, flower beds, paths, and a fountain'; in the centre of this space stood another bandstand.[64] Reflecting the fact that the exhibition was designed to keep visitors on site, as well as

[54] *Licensed Victuallers' Mirror* (hereafter *L.V.M.*), 18 March 1890, p. 121.
[55] The enormous change to the site following the erection of the Embankment is noted in *All the Year Round* (hereafter *A.T.Y.R.*), 7 June 1890, pp. 533–4.
[56] T.N.A., RAIL 1014/55: Notices of exhibitions; *Official Report*, p. 11; *Official Catalogue*, p. xxiii; and *I.L.N.*, 7 June 1890, p. 733.
[57] For the Hospital Commissioners granting permission to use the site for the exhibition, see *Times*, 23 Oct. 1889, p. 8.
[58] *Saturday Review*, 17 May 1890, p. 603.
[59] *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 222.
[60] *Punch*, 10 May 1890, p. 225; 24 May 1890, p. 244.
[61] *I.L.N.*, 17 May 1890, p. 626.
[62] *Official Catalogue*, p. xxiii.
[63] *Official Catalogue*, pp. xxiii–xxiv; and *Official Report*, p. 4.
[64] *Official Report*, p. 3.

opportunities for refreshments, public toilets for ladies and gentlemen were situated conveniently in the north and south galleries, as well as in the park.[65]

The spatial design of the exhibition cultivated an immersive 'inter-sensory' experience for the visitor, notably through its 'beautiful and extensive' gardens.[66] During the day they formed 'a pleasant … promenade', where 'Flags move and flutter from every point' and 'there are so many taking green vistas opening out on either hand, with shrubs, and flowers, and trees in all their natural freshness and vigour'.[67] Meanwhile, in the evening, as the adverts noted, they were 'Brilliantly illuminated' by the novel technology of electric lighting, as well as by fashionable Chinese lanterns and fairy lights hung from the trees, 'producing a very pretty effect' (Figure 1).[68] Such attractions had clear antecedents in eighteenth-century urban pleasure gardens like Vauxhall and Ranelagh (which had been incorporated into the grounds of Chelsea Hospital) as well as their nineteenth-century successors, such as Cremorne (also in Chelsea). Although less morally ambiguous than these spaces, the R.M.E. gardens likewise prompted multi-sensory enjoyment, not only visual, but also auditory. Several visitors described the hourly chiming of a grand military-themed clock, the gentle plashing of the fountain, the shouted


**Figure 1.** The gardens at night.
Source: *Pick-Me-Up*, 14 June 1890, p. 169. National Library of Scotland.

[65] However, not everyone was convinced of the value for money offered by Spiers and Pond, who held the monopoly on refreshments (*B.M.M.*, 1 Aug. 1890, p. 138).
[66] *Saturday Review*, 17 May 1890, p. 603.
[67] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 534; and *I.L.N.*, 5 July 1890, pp. 21–2.
[68] *I.L.N.*, 19 July 1890, p. 93; *Official Report*, pp. 3–4; and *Times*, 8 May 1890, p. 8. For the contemporary cultural politics of electric light, see C. Otter, *The Victorian Eye: a Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (Chicago, 2008).

commands of N.C.O.s, and the excited roar of the crowds in the arena, 'who apparently like noise, and plenty of it'.[69] However, it was through music that the pleasurable experience of the gardens was most closely associated with the military.

The R.M.E. provided a unique musical soundscape and newspaper advertisements made it a key attraction.[70] The *Graphic* observed in August that the 'promoters have left no stone unturned to make the Exhibition a success', not least by utilizing the 'open spaces' for regimental bands, whose 'inspiriting strains … generally attract large crowds'.[71] The exhibition's extensive soundscape had been planned from its inception. In May, the *Musical Times* declared that 'a special bandstand of colossal dimensions has been erected on the eastern side of the arena, with an arched roof specially designed by Colonel Shaw-Hellier (director of the Royal Military School of Music) and capable of holding four or five hundred musicians with the greatest ease. In order to test the acoustic qualities of the structure, some trial performances were held with a band of eighty performers. The results were eminently satisfactory: 'The band, although they occupied but a small portion of the available space, were perfectly heard at a distance of 150 yards'.[72] The music was thus both pervasive and continuous, the bands playing 'delightful music … all the day from 11.30am' so that 'when the music ceases on this side, the strains are taken up on the other'.[73] It thereby accompanied *all* visitors' activities; whether sitting on the veranda, taking refreshments, strolling in the gardens, or viewing the exhibits, the bands' 'sweet strains' emanated from the three dedicated bandstands (Figure 2), or were carried from place to place as they promenaded the grounds (Figure 3).[74] There were also regular large-scale events. As *The Times* noted, 'A monster band of 450 performers [played] every alternate Wednesday', including a 'Grand Afternoon Concert by the Massed Bands of the Grenadier Guards and Scots Guards' together with torchlit tattoos.[75] In fact, the music was so pervasive that it was occasionally regarded as intrusive; a writer in *Judy* humorously described the fireworks and Grand Tattoo by the drums and fifes of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers as 'Excellent, but a bit deafening'.[76]

The army's associations with music were long-standing and British military bands had been subject to improvement with the formation in 1857 of the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall to 'raise our bands *en masse* to the standards already attained by neighbouring nations'.[77] Indeed, the R.M.E. included a Music Gallery, whose display of instruments provided a history of the 'development of the modern military band', specialist talks about them, and occasional recitals, an element of the exhibition effusively praised by the musical press.[78] The linking of the army with music had affective power. It was widely recognized by contemporaries that music was 'the language of the heart' and a means 'to give pleasure'.[79] Military music was thought to have an especially rousing quality.[80] Reports frequently described the regimental bands' 'enlivening' and 'stirring' power for the listener, while martial music's unique ability to elicit and fix positive feelings about the army, often in concert with other sensory stimuli, was an acknowledged feature of the exhibition.[81] One commentator observed that 'the rich uniforms, the gold braid, the glittering helmets, the flags, and the pennons, with musical artillery of the bands … make up a scene which stirs the blood of a British householder'.[82] The music scholar Hermann Smith likewise claimed that he loved 'the pomp and circumstance of war'; with

[69] Hickman, *Souvenir*, pp. 39–61; *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 534; and *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 223.
[70] See, e.g., *I.L.N.*, 7 June 1890, p. 733.
[71] *Graphic*, 23 Aug. 1890, p. 198. *The Times* (8 May 1890, p. 8) also noted that the R.M.E. ought to be popular on account of its military bands.
[72] *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, xxxi (May 1890), p. 272.
[73] Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 77; and *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 534.
[74] Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 61.
[75] *Times*, 16 Apr. 1890, p. 6; and *I.L.N.*, 2 Aug. 1890, p. 158.
[76] *Judy*, 10 Sept. 1890, p. 125.
[77] *Musical Standard*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 77; and *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 655.
[78] Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 31. For an extensive description of the Musical Annexe, see *Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review*, xiii (July 1890), pp. 415–16; *Musical Standard*, 1 March 1890, p. 193; and *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, xxxi (June 1890), pp. 338–9.
[79] Hickman, *Souvenir*, pp. 14–15.
[80] Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, pp. 74–5, 142–3, 146–7; and R. Giddings, 'Delusive seduction: pride, pomp, circumstance and military music', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism*, pp. 25–49.
[81] *I.L.N.*, 5 July 1890, p. 22; *Souvenir*, p. 31; and *Graphic*, 23 Aug. 1890, p. 198.
[82] *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 222.

'drums beating, banners flying, horses tramping [and] trumpets braying', he wrote, the 'eyes glisten, pulses beat faster, and a wave of excitement thrills through the whole being.'[83]

These inter-sensory and inter-material dimensions did more than rouse patriotic feeling. They also functioned on a more intimate and personal level to evoke memories that embedded positive sentiments about the British army in the visitor's psyche. Thus, Smith recalled how martial music reminded him nostalgically of childhood and youthful encounters with regiments passing through town, a trumpeter resplendent on his white horse, while the martial cymbals and 'jingling Johnnies' of the Guards' bands of old evoked a past lost 'over the edge of the world'. For Smith, as for many commentators, music was a powerful reminder of youthful enthusiasm for military service, and he asked, 'Can we not all of us tell of young eyes feasted and dazzled with the glory of colour, of young hearts longing, for one day at least, for martial glory with supremist desire[?]'[84]

The sensory immersion of the exhibition, which could deepen positive feelings about the British army, extended to other gustatory and olfactory senses. The Trade Section, for instance, offered numerous opportunities for smelling, tasting and imaginative transportation. Hickman described his 'weakness for tasting' as he made his way through stalls showcasing cooking implements that the


**Figure 2.** One of the bandstands in the park.
Source: *Illustrated London News*, 5 July 1890, p. 21 (detail). © Illustrated London News Ltd. / Mary Evans.

[83] *Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review*, xiii (July 1890), p. 415.
[84] *Musical Opinion*, p. 415.

army might use, tasting and smelling all the foodstuffs and beverages on offer.[85] Meanwhile, the soap and perfume stalls evoked the 'sweet scents of Araby', while a saddle and whisky stall conjured the romance of Scotland. These sensations were most powerful when combined with military spectacle. Thus, Hickman records drinking beer while listening to the band of the 2nd Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment and having tea 'under the verandah of the Temperance Pavilion' where they were 'just in time to witness the ascent of the huge war balloon.'[86]

The 'Great War Balloon', with its capacity of 60,000 cubic feet, was another example of the manifold experiential and immersive pleasures of the exhibition.[87] Regular flights were available to the fee-paying few in its eight-passenger car, offering remarkably novel views of London; but the balloon's ascent was also advertised and experienced as a spectacle in itself.[88] Balloons had played an increasingly important role in military reconnaissance since the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, but, in an article in *Punch*, the journalist Horace Frank Lester recounted his trip by playing humorously on their offensive potential:

> Disappointed, as a 'War Balloon' seems to be the same as a Peace Balloon. Expected it to be armour-plated, or fitted with aerial torpedoes, or something of that sort. Ask Professional Aeronaut if I mayn't take a bomb up with me, and drop it, as practice for war time? Aeronaut scowls fiercely. Asks, 'If I want to blow the Balloon to smithereens? Also asks, 'If I have any bombs about me now?' Looks as if he would like to search me! Drop the subject – not the bomb. Still, I *should* like to know how I can 'assist Military Science.'[89]


**Figure 3.** Pipers of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders parading the Gordon House quadrangle. Source: *Graphic*, 23 Aug. 1890, p. 212. Private Collection: Look and Learn / Illustrated Papers Collection / Bridgeman Images.

[85] Hickman, *Souvenir*, pp. 35–6, 46, 72.
[86] Hickman, *Souvenir*, pp. 50, 61–2.
[87] *I.L.N.*, 17 May 1890, p. 638.
[88] Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 50; and *Punch*, 12 July 1890, p. 13. At the Royal Naval Exhibition the following year, the same Mr. Spencer (presumably Percival Green Spencer or one of his brothers) again offered balloon rides, which gave rise to some of the earliest printed aerial photographs of London (*Strand Magazine*, ii (July 1891), pp. 492–8).
[89] *Punch*, 7 June 1890, p. 274 (emphasis in original).

In the article Lester ends up in hospital, after crashing in Essex, a victim of the perils of technological modernity. Indeed, the balloon was not without its dangers, and the *Graphic* dedicated its front page to an illustration of a real incident on 1 July when the balloon lost buoyancy due to an electrical storm and crashed into a house in Upper Norwood.[90]

These immersive, entertaining activities were not simply fun; this enjoyment, in the context of the inter-material and inter-sensory exhibition, cultivated a prosthetic feeling that associated the army and empire with pleasure and adventure. For example, the Ambulance Gallery, which was among the 'great attractions of the Exhibition', deliberately evoked colonial settings, the scenery representing 'foreign service, in a tropical or sub-tropical climate'.[91] As one commentator described it, 'We are in an open kind of jungle, with reeds, bamboos, and waving palms, and a rough kind of ground to the front, where with puffs of smoke and the rattle of heavy firing, the work of the fighting line is going on apace'.[92] *Horse and Hound* noted that this scene was rendered through a background of 'painted natural scenery, in front of which are imposed natural objects that form a foreground to mimic distance'. The gallery was perhaps most notable for its highly realistic taxidermy, made by the celebrated naturalist, Rowland Ward, who had provided 'the famous jungle scene in the Indian and Colonial Exhibition of 1886'. The display included elephants, camels, horses and mules, as well as vultures, which were deemed to 'give verisimilitude to the scene, as well as tropical foliage and such features that add to its truthfulness and beauty'.[93] The 'Indian Jungle Shooting Gallery' likewise deployed a backdrop of 'tropical scenery'. Here members of the public could pay a penny to shoot at tin animals, including rabbits and wildfowl, that were spring-loaded so as to 'disappear on being shot, and reappear in an instant'.[94] This was an enormously popular attraction, and, on his visit, Hickman noted the queues for entry, while the *Licensed Victuallers' Mirror*, which thought it 'the best of the kind we have seen', anticipated it making 'a great deal of money'.[95]

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The sense-scape of the R.M.E. was similarly evident in the profusion of objects on display in the Battle Gallery. One commentator declared that, for the 'general visitor', this was the 'the most attractive portion of the exhibition'. It consisted of 'a loan collection of pictures of battles or portraits of celebrated soldiers, and of a surprising number of valuable military relics'.[96] Some of the latter dated from as early as the mid seventeenth century; however, most commemorated the 'Military History of England [*sic*]' from the battles of Blenheim, Dettingen, and Culloden, through the Peninsula and Waterloo, Crimea, and Indian Rebellion, right up to recent conflicts in Egypt and Sudan.[97] They included armour; helmets; flags; trophies; the personal effects of notable commanders, including Marlborough, Wellington and Napier; and objects of unique historical importance, such as the 'keys of Corunna', an 'arm-sling worked by the Queen during the Crimean War', and the ill-fated Captain Louis Nolan's sabretache from Balaclava.[98] According to the *Field*, 'The visitor might dwell for hours examining the pictures, the uniforms, the medals, and other reliques [*sic*] of bygone times'.[99]

The power of the Battle Gallery was enhanced by the way the objects and images on display worked with each other to fire visitors' imagination. *Baily's Monthly Magazine* praised the 'care and labour' of Malet and his colleagues for 'making the contents of the cases that line the walls tell the story in detail of the portraits or battle-pieces that hang above them'. Malet himself noted how 'the colours and arms on the walls [were] directly connected with the events commemorated in the pictures near them', while the portraits of the officers involved in these campaigns were displayed next to associated 'relics

[90] *Graphic*, 19 July 1890, pp. 54, 55, 58.
[91] *Official Report*, p. 4; and *Official Catalogue*, p. 181.
[92] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 536.
[93] *Horse and Hound*, 10 May 1890, p. 281; and *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 536.
[94] *Punch*, 12 July 1890, p. 13; and Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 76.
[95] *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 223.
[96] *Saturday Review*, 17 May 1890, p. 603; and *The Times*, 21 March 1890, p. 11.
[97] *Official Report*, p. 6.
[98] *I.L.N.*, 17 May, pp. 626, 629; 24 May 1890, p. 646; 5 July 1890, pp. 21–2; and *B.M.M.*, 1 Aug. 1890, p. 138.
[99] *Field*, 10 May 1890, p. 68.

placed in the cases on the floor'.[100] The appeal of the Battle Gallery was such that some advocated for the retention of many of these objects and their assimilation into a national collection formed around the existing museum of the Royal United Service Institute.[101] This had been founded in 1829 as a collection of intellectually improving natural historical specimens, but by the 1850s was developing into a more professional military museum concerned with the history and science of warfare.[102] Although this vision never came to pass, the R.M.E. thus marks an important step on the road to permanent regional and national military museum collections.

The relics on display at the R.M.E. were not simply historical artefacts, however; as Henrietta Lidchi and Nicole Hartwell have argued, such objects were 'preserved essentially for their link to human events, and in particular to death and martyrdom' and performed 'powerfully within a culture of memory and sentiment'.[103] This emotional power was enhanced by the catalogue, which was designed as a companion to the exhibition, providing what the duchess of Rutland called 'accounts of thrilling incidents', which brought 'scenes of the wars … vividly before the mind, when the arms, the accoutrements used, with morsels of the colours borne, are seen'.[104] This combination was calculated to generate a strong emotional response, akin to the veneration of religious relics.[105] Rutland maintained that the Battle Gallery 'should be visited in a reverential spirit', while another writer considered visiting as tantamount to a 'pilgrimage'.[106] The personal effects of 'fallen heroes' were particularly intimate and moving. Hickman described seeing the saddle of Louis-Napoleon, prince imperial, who had been killed in British service in the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879. Raising his eyes from this 'sad relic' to the portrait of the young officer, he and his companion shed a 'tear of sorrow' as they contemplated the empress' grief and imagined how these artefacts would pierce the 'sympathising hearts of all English mothers'.[107]

In the sensorily heightened context of the R.M.E., such relics formed a transhistorical thread that stimulated prosthetic feelings whereby sympathy for past sacrifices and pride in past glories were linked directly to the strategic and imperial interests of the modern British army. The columnist for *Baily's Monthly Magazine* asserted that he did 'not believe that anyone can walk through the Battle Gallery quite unmoved. To older soldiers and young it is both a glorious memory and a trumpet call; it is the past that may become a future'.[108] The gallery presented such a kaleidoscopic cavalcade of colonial conflict from the previous half-century that even the Crimean War seemed a distant memory: 'We have wars great and little', claimed another journalist, 'for it is only for a year or two now and then that the gates of the temple of Janus can be closed'.[109] In this way, *Baily's* columnist suggested, the attentions of 'the majority turn to the recent warfare in Africa and the Soudan, as coming more home to our feelings; for is not the Crimea a very old story?' Even 'the pathos' evoked by Lady Elizabeth Butler's historical paintings appealed, he feared, 'to a generation to whom the Alma and Inkerman are only names'.[110] Nevertheless, for 'seniors' like him, as well as for younger visitors, the cumulative effect of the exhibition was to flatten historical time into a universal sentiment, so that, in the words of the duchess of Rutland, the visitor was moved to reflect that 'in every country, in every period of history, in every clime, the British soldier calmly and heroically has done, and still does, his duty to his country'.[111]

Accoutrements and other personal items were not the only objects of historical interest in the gallery, for commentators frequently drew attention to the presence of military veterans. While the cultural image of army veterans had long been an ambiguous one, frequently associated with impoverishment, disability and dependence, by 1890 they were increasingly being represented in

[100] *B.M.M.*, 1 Aug. 1890, p. 138; and *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 654. See also *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 534.
[101] *The Times*, 18 Nov. 1890, p. 6.
[102] Hartwell, 'Repository of virtue?'.
[103] Lidchi and Hartwell, 'Colonial collections', p. 77.
[104] *U.S.M.*, new ser., i (Apr.–Sept. 1890), p. 193.
[105] Begiato, *Manliness in Britain*, pp. 125–7.
[106] *U.S.M.*, new ser., i (Apr.–Sept. 1890), p. 193; and *L.V.M.*, 18 March 1890, p. 223.
[107] Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 71.
[108] *B.M.M.*, 1 Aug. 1890, p. 138.
[109] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 535.
[110] *B.M.M.*, 1 Aug. 1890, p. 138.
[111] *U.S.M.*, new ser., i (Apr.–Sept. 1890), p. 196.

more romantic terms as 'picturesque figures' who were the living embodiment of past conflicts.[112] Given the R.M.E.'s location at Chelsea Hospital, it is unsurprising that veterans were a key feature of the galleries and gardens, one writer commenting that visitors might find their way into quiet walks and 'chat with these relics of the old army'.[113] Neither were they simply an ornamental backdrop; they were employed as exhibition staff, with around forty-six working as supervisors and turnstile attendants, clad in a distinctive blue uniform with red facings, bearing the letters 'R.M.E.' on forage cap and collar.[114]

Collectively, veterans and long-serving personnel added a profoundly affective dimension to the exhibits, not only as living connections to past conflicts, but as a supplement to the objects in the gallery or catalogue descriptions. In numerous accounts of the exhibition, authors recounted overhearing or even imagining their stories and experiences. Thus, *The Times* reported that when the prince and princess of Wales visited, their enjoyment of the battle pictures and portraits was enhanced by 'the charm … that at their sides, and now and again called to explain the pictures of some of our latest battles, were officers who had played a conspicuous part in them, as Lord Wolseley, Sir Redvers Buller, and others'.[115] Those of a lower rank served a similar purpose; *All the Year Round* imagined 'Sergeant Atkins in mufti' with his wife and 'pretty and sensible daughter' examining the 'pictures and curios on the walls'. '"There's our old regiment going up the Nile. And yonder's our camp in Zulu-land," the Sergeant explains to his wife; while his daughter examines critically the old military trappings, and the pictures of the long-coated, curled-feather darlings of a past age'.[116]

Moreover, veterans were, themselves, objects on display; like the historical relics, they promoted prosthetic feeling by flattening past and present, notably through their juxtaposition with serving soldiers. In their scarlet finery and spanning every stage of the soldiers' life cycle from fresh-faced youths to white-bearded pensioners, they were objects of deep public fascination. The opening ceremony on 7 May was particularly remarkable for the presence of the 'flower of England's army, the gallant lads in red, the defenders of our hearths and homes', including a profusion of general officers in white-plumed cocked hats. Indeed, despite a number of women wearing scarlet 'just to show [they] dote on the military', the *Illustrated London News* thought it 'very instructive to see how the finest female clothing faded into insignificance beside the panoply of war'.[117] Among the many military dignitaries was the ninety-one-year-old George Keppel, Lord Albemarle, 'who nearly three-quarters of a century ago fought in the ranks of the 14th Regiment at Waterloo', while the ceremony itself involved a boys' band from the Duke of York's School, one hundred Chelsea pensioners 'in their long red coats and Ramillies cocked hats', and a guard of honour from the 1st Battalion Scots Guards. As *The Times* observed, 'There were thus within the space of less than an acre of ground representatives of our military past, present, and future, and the last will not fail to win fame if they tread in the footsteps of the first two'.[118]

Even for those who did not necessarily attend the exhibition in person, such sentiments were given powerful graphic expression in the numerous illustrations of the R.M.E. in the popular press. These often foreground the figure of the soldier, not only the uniformed mannequins of the Army Clothing Department or popular Indian collections, but also the many military visitors.[119] Moreover, they regularly pictured soldiers and civilians *together*, as in the case of this image from the front page of the *Graphic*, titled 'Interested spectators – three generations of soldiers' (Figure 4). This portrays what the paper called a 'specially suggestive scene' (whether taken from life or entirely imagined it is impossible to say) in which a guardsman is demonstrating developments in army field uniform to a Chelsea pensioner, while on his right a drummer boy listens intently.[120] Perhaps what is most striking

[112] *I.L.N.*, 17 May 1890, p. 626; and M. Brown and J. Begiato, 'Visualising the aged veteran in nineteenth-century Britain: memory, masculinity and nation', in *Martial Masculinities: Experiencing and Imagining the Military in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. M. Brown, A. M. Barry and J. Begiato (Manchester, 2019), pp. 102–36.
[113] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 533.
[114] *Official Report*, p. 13; and *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 655.
[115] *Times*, 8 May 1890, p. 8.
[116] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 534.
[117] *Sporting Gazette*, 10 May 1890, p. 638; and *I.L.N.*, 17 May 1890, p. 634.
[118] *The Times*, 8 May 1890, p. 8.
[119] *Graphic*, 23 Aug. 1890, p. 198; and *U.S.M.*, new ser., i (Apr.–Sept. 1890), p. 194.
[120] *Graphic*, 13 Sept. 1890, pp. 281, 283.

here is the permeability between these military visitors and the exhibits themselves; the guardsman is touching the bandolier on the mannequin behind the rail, while the veteran and the boy are in contact with the rail itself. Only they occupy this liminal space between the exhibitory and public spaces. Meanwhile, a family of civilians observes the pensioner and guardsman, the young girl gazing upwards, entranced by the latter. For these figures, and for many actual visitors to the R.M.E., such military men were as much part of the spectacle as the formal exhibits.[121]

This act of people watching lay at the heart of modern exhibition culture. Beyond the numerous instances of racialized and exoticized colonial 'peoples on display' in metropolitan exhibitions, the scopophilic pleasures of urban spectatorship included watching the watchers.[122] The *Illustrated London News* mused that 'no exhibition can be so truly interesting as the crowd of visitors to the exhibition'. As this same article suggested, however, looking at others was not merely a pleasure in itself; rather, it enlisted both subject and object of the gaze into a community of feeling about the British army. Again, these sentiments are given striking visual form in the accompanying illustrations, which focus on three visitors regarding exhibited objects: a 'retired officer' and 'young officer', both in civilian dress, and a young woman (Figure 5). The arrangement of the engravings on the page invites the viewer to imagine these individuals in relation to each other, as both men appear to gaze upon the woman, while she seems to watch the young officer. Although the text refers to the 'retired Major or Colonel, whose life has been spent in toilsome work for Queen and country' and the 'young subaltern, who intends to do his duty in the same faithful spirit', it also encourages the reader to 'feel with … the gentle girl who is just now looking at a picture in the Battle Gallery'. Her 'sympathy' for the 'highest manly virtues' of 'duty and honour', which are the 'moral compensation for all the mischief and misery of warfare', is presented as a 'pleasing and wholesome human sentiment'.[123]


**Figure 4.** 'The military exhibition revisited – interested spectators – three generations of soldiers'.
Source: *Graphic*, 13 Sept. 1890, p. 282. Private Collection: Look and Learn / Illustrated Papers Collection / Bridgeman Images.

[121] See also *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 223.
[122] Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*.
[123] *I.L.N.*, 7 June 1890, p. 724.

Some people were more explicitly on display than others. In the East Gallery, the Army Clothing Department's section demonstrated the modern manufacture of uniforms, including a number of young female sewing machinists, 'all in a semi-military uniform of scarlet garibaldis and blue serge skirts, under whose deft fingers the tunic of the artilleryman or the gay embroidered jacket of the hussar may be seen taking form and substance'.[124] Above all, however, it was the objects manufactured by soldiers themselves that were at the heart of the R.M.E. and which embodied some of the tensions about the function of the modern military and its personnel. The founding purpose of the R.M.E., the Military Industrial Section housed a vast number of objects crafted by soldiers and their families, ranging from paintings and needlework, through furniture and leatherwork, to maps, models and photographs.[125] These were intended for sale, to help raise money for Soldiers' Institutes, thereby testifying to these men's worthy benevolence. However, while the *Souvenir* hoped that visitors 'who take a fancy to those works of patience and skill, will not hesitate to give the full price asked for them', and while Queen Victoria herself 'made a considerable purchase', in reality, as the official report noted, 'the prices put on the articles was generally high, and … the amount realised by sales was comparatively small'.[126]

Indeed, despite its centrality to the rationale of R.M.E., this craftwork was subject to ambivalent reporting. Its sheer profusion was overwhelming to the senses and hard to both navigate and comprehend. Unlike the much-praised Battle Gallery, the Military Industrial Section lacked a coherent narrative or sense of purpose beyond its own superfluity. On the other hand, others complained that there were 'fewer articles and a smaller variety of articles exhibited than might have been expected', noting the lack of contributions from the guards, even though they were generally on home service, and the 'poor show' from four battalion corps such as the 60th and Rifle Brigade.[127] Moreover, while once

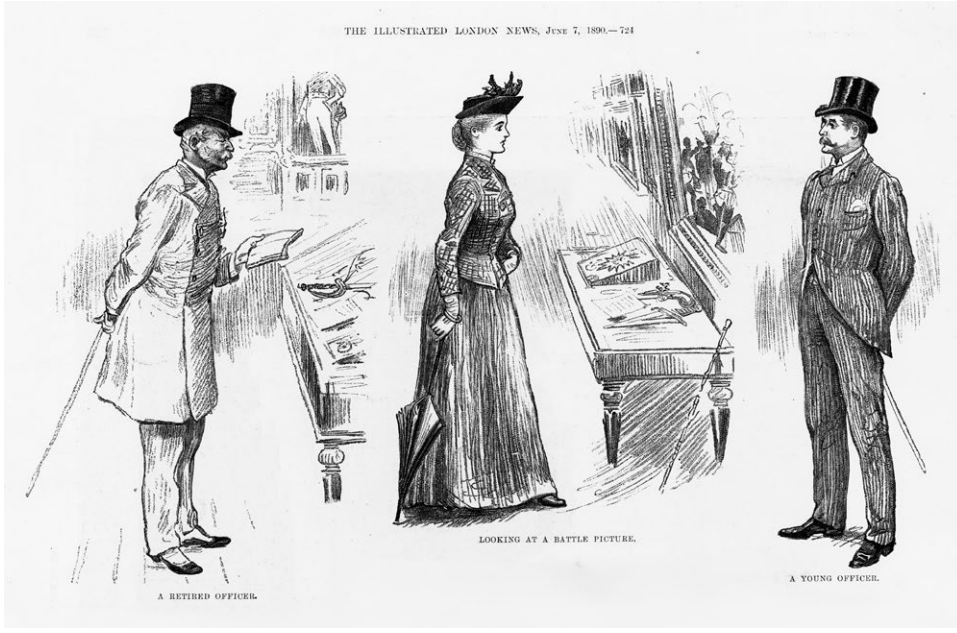


**Figure 5.** Illustrations of visitors to the R.M.E.
Source: *Illustrated London News*, 7 June 1890, p. 724. © Illustrated London News Ltd. / Mary Evans.

[124] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 536; see also Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 65.
[125] For detailed descriptions, see *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 653; *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, pp. 535–6; *Field*, 17 May 1890, p. 733; and *U.S.M.*, new ser., i (Apr.–Sept. 1890), p. 194.
[126] Hickman, *Souvenir*, p. 67; *The Times*, 11 July 1890, p. 8; and *Official Report*, p. 5. According to the *Official Report*, p. 41, the sale of the exhibited items raised only £92 7*s* 6*d*.
[127] *The Times*, 23 May 1890, p. 13.

seen as a marker of soldiers' 'industry, thrift', domestication and sobriety, such crafts were seemingly now less affecting.[128] By 1890 the soldier's quilt, in particular, had come to be seen as a somewhat clichéd and outmoded expression of working-class respectability and Malet himself acknowledged the general assumption that 'industrial work by soldiers comprised little more than patchwork quilts of marvellous hues arranged in the most inartistic confusion, and mats made out of old regimental facings'.[129] While they may not necessarily have answered the needs of the modern labour market, such craft skills were thought to demonstrate soldiers' ability to exercise 'immense patience' and 'acquire habits of industry which will be of incalculable service to them on their return to civil life'.[130] There was also still pleasure to be had in contemplating 'hands which, in the imminent deadly breach, are accustomed to weapons more deadly than the crochet needle' performing delicate crafts that 'have hitherto been supposed only to be women's handiwork'.[131] And yet, such contrasts could now generate contempt as much as admiration. *The Times* was particularly derisive, stating, 'Among the exhibits of the Regular troops there is the usual profusion, not only of dressed dolls, female underclothing, etc., the preparation of which is a woman's natural occupation, but also of innumerable patchwork quilts, table-covers, etc., by their husbands and fathers, who might by advantage have turned their talents to better account than the performance of women's work, and that of a nature neither very useful nor very interesting'.[132]

In some ways, this ambivalence concerning Tommy Atkins' craft productions can be mapped onto a broader cultural shift towards the more rugged and aggressive conceptions of masculinity that marked the era of New Imperialism.[133] Yet, while contemporary observers seem to have been little charmed by the mid Victorian model of the soldier as domestic saint, all scarlet, pipeclay and pincushions, neither had they quite embraced the image of Tommy Atkins as khaki-clad killer. As suggested earlier, the R.M.E. took place with the army on the cusp of technological modernity and the full impact of innovations such as the machine gun and quick-firing artillery had yet to be fully felt or understood. The Royal Artillery's display included examples of modern ordnance, such as 'the latest 12-pounder' and a 'bank gun' with 'complicated sighting arrangements and hydraulic buffers to prevent recoil', whose 'range extends over miles', while examples of 'death-dealing Gardner, Nordenfeldt, and Gatling guns' could be viewed in the Trade Section.[134] However, there was a relative dearth of modern weaponry on display, and one commentator noted that 'it may perhaps be a slight disappointment to some who visit the Military Exhibition, that the pacific side of military life is more fully represented than the science of destruction, with all its latest and most elaborate apparatus'.[135] In truth, even if the *Telegraph* could claim that 'the Royal Military Exhibition is the first instance in which it has been attempted to fully present to the public the complex nature of modern war and modern armies', others were uninterested in their technical and destructive aspects, declaring that 'highly scientific knowledge [was] necessary' to comprehend them. The correspondent for the *Field* even complacently suggested that such matters scarcely fell 'within the peaceful purview of the country house'.[136]

Instead, and much like the contemporary art of Lady Butler, whose battle paintings evoked the dash and drama of Waterloo and Balaclava, the R.M.E. generally avoided fetishizing technological modernity in favour of a romantic humanizing of the British redcoat.[137] As the *Saturday Review* noted, while there was a 'fine display of implements of war, which deserves the attention of the expert … These are lost sight of amid the vast aggregation of objects which either recall the past military glories

[128] Hickman, *Souvenir* p. 67; and *The Times*, 23 May 1890, p. 13.
[129] *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 653; and *The Times*, 8 May 1890, p. 8.
[130] *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 653; and *U.S.M.*, new ser., i (Apr.–Sept. 1890), p. 194.
[131] *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 223.
[132] *The Times*, 23 May 1890, p. 13. For the tensions identified between soldiers' duties and these more domestic leisure activities, see *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, pp. 535–6.
[133] J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), ch. 8; and B. Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 2014).
[134] *Field*, 17 May 1890, p. 733. For descriptions of weaponry, see *I.L.N.*, 5 July 1890, p. 22. For descriptions of innovations in weaponry, see *I.L.N.*, 24 May 1890, p. 658; and *Saturday Review*, 17 May 1890, p. 603.
[135] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, p. 536. There was, notably, no Maxim gun to be found, while the following year's Royal Naval Exhibition gave visitors the chance to witness one being fired on payment of 6*d* (*Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891: the Illustrated Handbook and Souvenir, Pall Mall Gazette 'Extra'*, lvi (June 1891), p. 62).
[136] *Telegraph*, 7 May 1890, p. 7; and *Field*, 17 May 1890, p. 733.
[137] MacKenzie, 'Introduction: popular imperialism and the military', p. 17; and J. W. M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: the Military in British Art, 1815–1914* (Manchester, 1988), ch. 5.

of the country or give evidence that the British soldier is looked upon in our army as something more than "mere food for cannon'.[138] Moreover, as we will now see, where the R.M.E. most directly addressed the concerns of military modernity was not in relation to the technological revolution in weaponry, but rather soldiers' bodies: their fitness, function and medical care.

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As we have heard, the eastern half of the exhibition grounds, adjacent to the Royal Hospital gardens, was dominated by a large arena complete with a grandstand that could double up as a monster bandstand. This was the site for performances of bodily proficiency by various army units, both regular and volunteer, as well as by the pupils of military schools. Such displays of military prowess were an established part of British public life. As one publication observed, 'There is no show in the world which so "fetches" the British public as a military spectacle'.[139] It was a popular pastime, for instance, to watch volunteer units undertaking manoeuvres in open public spaces such as Hyde Park, Wimbledon Common or those in Brighton.[140] No wonder, then, that, during the exhibition, newspaper advertisements promoted the daily performances in the arena. Among the most popular of these were the cavalry events, especially spectacular displays of skill with lance and sabre such as 'tent-pegging', 'lemon-cutting' and 'heads-and-posts'.[141] In addition to these, the infantry, volunteers and supporting services would perform physical drills, assaults-at-arms, artillery competitions and field encampments.[142] Several of these events were intended as pure entertainment and, like the Highland dances, tattoos and musical rides, contributed to the rousing and immersive soundscape of the exhibition.[143] Others were more explicitly concerned to demonstrate modern tactics, techniques and technologies in 'an age of incessant changes and improvements'.[144] For example, there were demonstrations of 'field railways' and, perhaps most notably of all, military cycling, which 'tended to show … the development of this latest aid to the mobility of an army'.[145] 'How the Peninsular veterans would have stared could they have seen a body of military cyclists!', exclaimed one observer, adding that 'I saw Crimean men rubbing their eyes with amazement'.[146] These were truly modern performances, not simply because they involved new types of technology, but also because they demonstrated novel forms of tactical mobility in an era that had seen the demise of close-order formation and the need for greater flexibility, initiative and physical agility on the part of soldiers.[147]

This shift is most evident from the place in the programme devoted to athletics. By the 1880s, institutional physical training had been formalized across the army through the introduction of the Army Gymnastic Staff, which focused on producing a well-trained, efficient force.[148] Newspaper advertisements and accounts of the R.M.E. record a plethora of activities ranging from 'soldierly gymnastics', through tugs of war, 'flat, hurdle, sack, and obstacle races, walking races in heavy marching order, jumping … and fencing', to team sports, such as cricket and football (Figure 6).[149] Such events were regular features of the exhibition but were given especial prominence during a distinct 'tournament' held in its closing weeks in early autumn.[150] These displays were directly inspired by the military tournament, an institution that originated in the 1870s and included foot races, track and field events, gymnastic displays, and competitive military skills.[151] Along with the introduction of

[138] *Saturday Review*, 17 May 1890, p. 603.
[139] *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 222.
[140] I. F. W. Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558–1945* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 175–8, 181.
[141] *I.L.N.*, 16 Aug. 1890, p. 222; 6 Sept. 1890, p. 311; *Sporting Gazette*, 4 Oct. 1890, p. 1378.
[142] *I.L.N.*, 2 Aug. 1890, p. 158; 14 June 1890, p. 751.
[143] *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 654.
[144] *Murray's Magazine*, viii (Sept. 1890), p. 385.
[145] *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 654; and *Bow Bells*, 10 Oct. 1890, p. 356.
[146] *Murray's Magazine*, viii (Sept. 1890), p. 385.
[147] Brown, 'Cold steel', pp. 162–3.
[148] J. D. Campbell, *The Army Isn't All Work: Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860–1920* (Abingdon, 2012), pp. 22–31.
[149] *I.L.N.*, 5 July 1890, p. 22; 6 Sept. 1890, p. 311; *Field*, 14 June 1890, p. 891; *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 654; and *Horse and Hound*, 16 Aug. 1890, p. 495.
[150] *Sporting Gazette*, 4 Oct. 1890, p. 1378.
[151] Campbell, *Army Isn't All Work*, pp. 43–4. Some of the organizers of the Royal Military Tournament were on the committee of the R.M.E. (*The Times*, 23 Oct. 1889, p. 8).

formalized gymnastic training programmes, these initiatives addressed degenerative anxieties about the physical fitness of the British soldier in an era characterized by debates over short service and 'boy-soldiers'.[152] This perhaps helps to account for the prominence of *actual* boys in the arena performances. For instance, the correspondent for *Horse and Hound*s declared 'I was especially delighted at the trooping of the colours by the little boys of the Royal Military Asylum, which takes place in the arena every afternoon at four o'clock, and the lads seem as well up to their drill as veterans'.[153] Meanwhile, the *Illustrated London News* remarked, 'A novel feature in the sports was the physical drill displayed by


**Figure 6.** Military games and exercises, involving young and old.
Source: *Illustrated London News*, 7 June 1890, front cover. © Illustrated London News Ltd. / Mary Evans.

[152] Campbell, *Army Isn't All Work*, pp. 23–44. For comparable developments in the navy, see E. J. Smith, 'Raising boys for the navy: health, welfare, and the British sea services, 1870–1905', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, lxxvi (2020), 53–77.
[153] *Horse and Hound*, 17 May 1890, p. 297.

the boys of the cadet battalion of the [East Surrey] regiment. … Their performance … was remarkably good'.[154] Press reports frequently focused on the bodily proficiency of these potential future recruits 'who moved and bore themselves in a manner worthy of soldiers' sons' and who carried out their ceremonial duties 'as well as if the performers had been veteran soldiers'. Such admiration of boys' physical competency and robustness served to reassure the public that the future of the British army was in safe hands and it is notable that these 'tiny battalion[s]' were rewarded in a manner that mimicked adult service, albeit with an age-appropriate, temperance twist; after one performance, for instance, they were 'marched to the London and Provincial Dairy Company's stand, where each was given a bun and a tumbler of milk'.[155]

These physical performances were designed to entertain, and some were explicitly intended to be light-hearted and 'whimsical'.[156] One advert promoted a 'Comic Cricket Match by the Sergeants of the first Battalion Grenadier Guards', while *The Times* noted that the display of the Royal Marines offered 'abundant opportunity for the comic side of athleticism'.[157] However, there were aspects of these performances that occasionally generated unintended mirth.[158] The gymnastic and calisthenic techniques displayed in the arena were relatively novel. The 1880s saw efforts to redefine the army's physical training programme to emphasize total fitness over the previous focus on upper-body strength; Scandinavian models of exercises were introduced, which were performed in unison, often to the accompaniment of popular music.[159] Perhaps these innovative, rhythmic exercises confounded some audiences unused to such exaggerated movements. Certainly, although *The Times* praised the 'admirable precision' of the Northamptonshire Regiment's physical drill, they mocked the 'want of dignity in posturing in absurd attitudes to the strains of "Two lovely black eyes" before the public'. 'Some of the attitudes', they observed, 'were very comic, one of them suggesting a frightened attempt to embrace a female spectre'. While the potential value of such movements 'in developing the muscles' of soldiers was evidently recognized, some, like this correspondent, felt them to be 'suitable to the barrack yard, but quite inappropriate to a public display'.[160] Moreover, as the reference to the popular music hall song 'Two Lovely Black Eyes' suggests, there was perhaps an inherent tension in such exercises between the cultures of entertainment and those of instruction; they were all too easily undercut by their theatrical associations and, in turn, the crowd's amusement. Thus, *The Times* reported on a 'very *theatrical* display by the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards', noting that in this '*circus* business' there was 'machine gun and rifle firing, and much carrying off the killed and wounded, a performance which the spectators seemed to think an excellent joke, and each time saluted with roars of laughter'. 'This military extravaganza was nearly becoming a *melodrama*', it added, 'for one of the combatants fired his rifle off when close to an opponent and injured his throat, but not seriously'.[161]

If the public reception of the performative dimensions of the R.M.E. was characterized by a curious mixture of earnest admiration and amused detachment, this was perhaps most evident in the highly popular Ambulance Gallery and the associated demonstrations of modern medical care in the arena. The gallery was located directly to the north of the arena, running its whole width, and was largely devoted to the work of the Army Medical Department. It contained a First Aid Station attended by members of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade who demonstrated various new appliances such as an 'Ashford litter', stretchers and crutches. Meanwhile, as we have heard, the Army Medical Department's exhibit presented naturalistic scenes of conflict in a colonial setting with human mannequins by Madame Tussaud and taxidermy animals by Rowland Ward. It was calculated to illustrate 'the treatment and carriage of a wounded soldier from the fighting line to the base of operations', demonstrating modern techniques of triage, wound dressing and evacuation, including a recreation of

[154] *I.L.N.*, 6 Sept. 1890, p. 311. See also *I.L.N.*, 17 May 1890, p. 638.
[155] *The Times*, 8 May 1890, p. 8; 15 May 1890, p. 13.
[156] *The Times*, 6 Oct. 1890, p. 10.
[157] *I.L.N.*, 23 Aug. 1890, p. 253; *Times*, 3 Oct. 1890, p. 10.
[158] For a suspicion that cyclists provoked laughter, see *Murray's Magazine*, viii (Sept. 1890), p. 385. For more laughter, see *Sporting Gazette*, 4 Oct. 1890, p. 1378.
[159] Campbell, *Army Isn't All Work*, pp. 47–52.
[160] *The Times*, 5 Aug. 1890, p. 10.
[161] *The Times*, 5 Aug. 1890, p. 10 (emphasis added). For another example of the *Times* undermining the displays' earnestness, see *Times*, 10 Oct. 1890, p. 4.

the interior of a railway carriage for transporting the wounded, and culminating in a model of a ward at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley. The exhibition also included a patent mobile field hospital, known as the 'Tortoise', designed by Captain A. S. Tompkins of the First Middlesex Volunteers, and stretcher bedsteads designed by Arthur Trehern Norton, surgeon commandant of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps.[162]

The ostensible purpose of the exhibition, which was directed by Surgeon Major Pratt, was to showcase the extensive medical care available for soldiers wounded in battle.[163] This was emblematic of a growing investment on the part of the military authorities in the health of the common soldier, something that was acutely relevant at a time when they were concerned to improve the image of the army and encourage recruitment. The popular press recognized this; the *Graphic*, for instance, noted that while it was the soldier's lot when on active service to receive wounds, visitors could 'see at a glance the methods adopted for the care and relief of the wounded in time of war', the exhibit illustrating 'the great advance which has been made, from a humanitarian point of view, in this branch of our army military service'. The accompanying illustration shows a group of largely female visitors, together with a Chelsea pensioner, examining the diorama of a field dressing station, the latter perhaps contemplating the 'old happy-go-lucky days when the very word "ambulance" was unknown to Englishmen' (Figure 7).[164] Likewise, Malet observed that for potential recruits, such displays of 'the realistic horrors of a battlefield', might have been off-putting, but that 'such feelings must have been overbalanced by the sight of the wonderful advance in all that appertains to the relief and care of the wounded'.[165]


**Figure 7.** The Army Medical Department exhibit.
Source: *Graphic*, 27 Sept. 1890, p. 344. Private Collection Look and Learn / IllustratedPapers Collection / Bridgeman Images.

[162] *Official Catalogue*, pp. 180–1. A lengthy description is also provided by *Graphic*, 27 Sept. 1890, pp. 343–4.
[163] *Saturday Review*, 17 May 1890, p. 603. See also *B.M.M.*, 1 Aug. 1890, pp. 137–8; and *Telegraph*, 7 May 1890, p. 7.
[164] *Graphic*, 27 Sept. 1890, pp. 343–4. See also *I.L.N.*, 10 May 1890, p. 585.
[165] *J.R.U.S.I.*, xxxv (1891), p. 654.

The appeal of these vignettes could transcend mere information to stimulate prosthetic feeling about the common soldier, facilitating a deep imaginative investment. Thus the correspondent for *All the Year Round* conjured the physical and emotional journey of a soldier from the moment of his wounding on the front line, surrounded by men with 'pale, woe-begone faces, writhing in agony' through the amputation of his limb by the regimental surgeon, and thence via animal-born litter and 'temporary railway', to the base hospital with its 'cool, roomy marquees, and comforts, and good nursing'. Here, he imagined the wounded man rallying so that soon he is 'sitting in the shade … enjoy[ing] his pipe again, and looking forward, for he has lost a limb, to his discharge, with something in the way of a pension, and home, and friends, and faithful Bess, looming pleasantly in the distance'.[166] This imaginative projection was stimulated by the apparent authenticity of the dioramas themselves.[167] Indeed, many visitors found them so realistic that they were actively discomforting. The 'Life in London' columnist for the *Licensed Victuallers' Mirror* warned, 'I would not select the Ambulance Gallery as a place to which to take "all young children and sick persons." These ghastly models of wounded men undergoing operations, of dead men and dying men, and of a most staring model of a hospital nurse make me long for the outer air'.[168]

As this wry comment on the disconcerting model of the nurse suggests, such a confrontation with the terrible realities of modern warfare could stimulate an ironic and amused detachment as much as an emotional connection. A certain amount of ridicule concerned the mannequins in the display, and the above columnist scornfully recommended that Rowland Ward 'could stuff some real man and so enable the committee to dispense with the awful graven images which now do duty for Tommy Atkins in a more or less shattered condition'.[169] In the case of *Punch*, however, the greatest amusement was derived from the performance of ambulance drill in the arena. In his article 'First Aid to Tommy Atkins', R. C. Lehmann, writing under the punning pseudonym of 'Le Petit Shows', mocked these 'charming manoeuvres'. His companion, 'a scoffer, who has never risen above a full privacy in the Eton Volunteers', was, he claimed, 'strangely moved'. Lehmann, by contrast, was less impressed by the spectacle of a sergeant directing ten detachments engaged in stretcher drill, with some men pretending to be wounded and others moving them on and off stretchers. He humorously describes the drill's various stages. At first, 'Stiff, solid, and in perfect line, stood the detachments waiting for the word to succour the afflicted', then in synchronized movements the 'wounded' lying down on their 'appointed spot to die, or be wounded, and to be bandaged and carried off'. In Lehmann's account there is a ludicrous discrepancy between the apparent urgency of the situation, a minute attention to sartorial and procedural detail (the sergeant upbraids a man for the misalignment of his chin-strap), and the resultant slowness of proceedings, so that when the 'wounded' men 'arrived at the place where ambulance was supposed to be, they had all been dead three-quarters of an hour'.[170]

The unintentional humour communicated by these performances of military modernity returns us to the urban men of leisure with whom we opened this article. A select number of humorous magazines foregrounded this figure in their accounts of the R.M.E. with indolent, self-indulgent, elite men lightly scoffing at proceedings. As well as Lehmann, Edward Spencer Mott, an ex-army officer writing as 'Nathanial Gubbins' in the *Sporting Times*, regaled readers with tales of his navigation of the R.M.E.'s opening ceremony and his quest for light refreshments, alcohol, 'lovely women', and a prime viewing spot. At one point, for instance, he states that 'ducking under the front rails, I take up a strategic position, which commands the entire show, and from which I could take, if necessary, about fifteen generals in flank and annihilate a military band, were there but a Gatling ready to my hand'.[171] Although in a minority, these self-conscious ironists' irreverence speaks to the inherent risks of the exhibitory format where education was delivered through the means of spectacle. As we have suggested, the performative aspects of the R.M.E. could easily stray into the realm of contemporary

[166] *A.T.Y.R.*, 7 June 1890, pp. 536–7.
[167] *Saturday Review*, 17 May 1890, p. 603.
[168] *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 223.
[169] *L.V.M.*, 13 May 1890, p. 223. *Punch*, 12 July 1890, p. 13, also mocked the figures' papier mâché heads with ill-fitting helmets.
[170] *Punch*, 9 Aug. 1890, p. 13.
[171] *Sporting Times*, 10 May 1890, p. 2.

popular entertainment, as typified by the music hall, where an excessively theatrical demeanour might generate mirth. This was especially marked when events were at their most solemn and earnest and, therefore, potentially ludicrous. Thus, while such ironic distance was still rooted in the immersive sensorium of the exhibition, the emotions it produced, typically those associated with indulgence and humour, rather than enlightenment and edification, could potentially undermine the deep sentimental attachment to the British army that the organizers sought to stimulate.

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The urban spectator roaming London in the late spring and summer of 1890 would have encountered numerous posters promoting the R.M.E., all of which bore an image of a mounted trooper of the 12th Lancers, 'sketched from life'. These became, in the words of the *Official Report*, a 'familiar object in and near the metropolis' and would have taken their place alongside an increasingly vast array of advertising imagery that cluttered the urban landscape, as commercial modernity reached full maturity.[172] In many ways, the R.M.E. was itself a commercial enterprise. We may recall that in the exhibition's *Souvenir*, Hickman's friend Willy was relieved to discover that the R.M.E. was more than just a 'bazaar', but the fact remains that the relics of Waterloo and the Alma in the Battle Gallery shared equal space with Pears's Soap and Van Houten's Cocoa in the Trade Section.[173] At one level, this conjunction of commercialism and militarism could generate discomfort. Numerous military commentators expressed anxiety that commercial modernity and the pursuit of profit were fundamentally inimical to martial vigour and national military prowess.[174] Moreover, even those outside the military saw the indignity of tainting the British army with the cultures of modern commerce. For instance, a contemporary cartoon in the popular magazine *Fun* titled 'Another "Military Exhibition"' joked about the prospect of British soldiers and, even, the duke of Cambridge being used as human placards for the promotion of a variety of products ranging from boot blacking and whisky to hair wash and camp coffee (Figure 8).[175] If this seemed like a ludicrous prospect in 1890, by the time of the second South African War at the end of the decade, such imagery of soldiers and military personnel being used to sell commercial products of precisely this kind had become virtually ubiquitous.[176] In many ways, therefore, the cultures of popular militarism established and promoted by events like the R.M.E. would profoundly influence popular engagement with the army. Indeed, the prosthetic feeling generated through inter-material encounters in the R.M.E. and the appealing image of the soldier that they helped promote and popularize would, as the decade wore on, play a vital role in increasing popular interest in, and imaginative engagement with, the army. Rather than working in opposition to the interests of the army, therefore, commercialism served to embed it within the popular consciousness, to bring it deep into the heart of the home, and to routinize the emotional investment that the R.M.E. had sought to stimulate.

The ultimate success of the R.M.E. in promoting militarism in Britain is, nonetheless, open to debate. After all, one of its purposes had been to encourage recruitment. While Malet thought that it was successful in this regard, asking, 'Who can say how many young men may have been fired with the very natural ambition to emulate the gallant deeds of Englishmen in all quarters of the earth?', there was no noticeable surge in working-class men signing up; the army remained a questionable employer and debates continued into the new century about the wisdom of relying upon volunteers in an age of mass conscription.[177] It is likewise true that Britain never saw the widespread *political* militarism (or anti-militarism) that was evident in France and Germany.[178] Yet we would contend that in helping to promote and sustain a popular *emotional* and *sentimental* attachment to the army, particularly among

[172] *Official Report*, pp. 10–11.
[173] Hickman, *Souvenir*, pp. 36–7; and *Official Catalogue*, p. 121.
[174] Brown, 'Cold steel', p. 161.
[175] *Fun*, 21 May 1890, p. 222.
[176] MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 25–7.
[177] *J.R.U.S.I.*, iii (1891), p. 654; and R. J. Q. Adams and P. P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900–18* (Basingstoke, 1987).
[178] N. Stargardt, *The German Idea of Militarism: Radical and Socialist Critics, 1866–1914* (Cambridge, 1994); and K. Morgan, 'Militarism and anti-militarism: socialists, communists and conscription in France and Britain 1900–1940', *Past & Present*, ccii (2009), 207–44.


**Figure 8.** 'Another military exhibition'.
Source: *Fun*, 21 May 1890, p. 222. National Library of Scotland.

the middle classes, the R.M.E. was an integral element in that culture of 'liberal militarism' identified by Summers, MacKenzie and others, and we question whether the widespread enthusiasm and mass volunteering that characterized the public response to the South African War could have existed in the absence of this and similar contemporary efforts to rouse the 'spectatorial passions' of the British public.[179] In this way, we believe, the R.M.E. forcibly demonstrates how the cultures of commercial modernity could facilitate popular militarism, and we would suggest that, for all its ambivalences and complexities, by mobilizing emotions, it achieved a notable success in helping to transform the place of the army in late Victorian British society.

[179] Summers, 'Militarism'; MacKenzie, 'Introduction: popular imperialism and the military'; and Hobson, *Psychology of Jingoism*, p. 12.