Gaslight Gazette Chapter XVII Read all about It '

Newspapers did not go in for headlines and large type in the mid 19th century. Even the relief of Sebastopol was set up in a sober type and column width which today would only suffice for the most modest news story , but the ' Gazette ' did have its share of exciting up-to-date news . This was an age of wonders - the 1851 Exhibition had encouraged the public to expect them - and the ' Gazette's editor and his reporters (if he had any, for it may have been a one man job) did their best to keep their readers informed.

Undersealing of cars may not be such a modern invention as we think. Mr Green, of 22 Norfolk Street , Lower Road, Islington, was reported in the ' Gazette ' on August 15 1855 as having invented 'a metalic oxide paint which will preserve wood, iron and copper. It may be applied over red lead paint, or any other material and for the preservation of the bottom of vehicles this invention will be of surpassing value '.

Methane gas was probably the substance which Mr Pea, of 16 Yeomans Row Cottages, Brompton, was ' extracting from every description of vegetable matter '. 'This finest and most luminous gas yet discovered was the description he gave to it ' free from all noxious and offensive effluvia . He uses no coal in the process and proposes to make his invention available for all culinary and domestic purposes.' .

The ' Gazette ' added that if Mr Pea would be pleased to call at their office they had a suggestion to make which may be of advantage to him.

An Hydraulic Appliance ' for raising and lowering shop shutters mechanically ' would have relieved over-burdened shop assistants from the chore at closing and opening times This had recently been installed by the Standard Insurance Company at their premises in George Street, Edinburgh, and consisted of 'a contraption supplied with water from a cistern placed on the top of the house at a height of 50 feet and conveyed by a one inch pipe into a cylinder fitted with a piston, which using the water pressure, raised or lowered the shutter, the machine being worked by a small handle.'

The ' new straw writing paper ' manufactured by Parkins and Gotto, 24/25 Oxford Street, was advertised as being invaluable to rapid writers It has a smooth surface and can written on on both sides with either a metal or a quill pen. Parkins and Gotto also sold ' the new elastic Post Office Pen at sixpence a dozen ' warranted not to scratch the paper. '.

Perhaps this had something to do with the ' Gazette ' announcement that on Saturday November 18 1854 ' the largest mail ever sent from London was sent from the General Post office at St Martin le Grand. It consisted of 62 boxes of letters and papers and twelve portmanteaux and required upwards of twenty omnibuses to convey the enormous mass of

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correspondence to the rail terminus at Waterloo Road en route for Southampton where it was embarked per ship to India, Australia etc. The reason for this mail being so heavy was chiefly in consequence of the fact of its being the first despatch since the reduction of the post rate to Australia from one shilling to sixpence, newspapers going free?, (Not to mention Parkins and Gotto's elastic pens !) An intriguing advertisement in the ' Gazette's ' For Sale ' columns keeping its reader au fait with every modern convenience was that for a ' Double Action Bath . ' A choice bath which combines the ordinary warm bath with the complementary apparatus of a shower bath. It has a furnace attached and a light moveable chimney so that it may be commodiously placed in any small spare room. In perfect order and on very moderate terms. Apply Goodacres, Church Lane.'

The combination of iron and steam had revolutionised transport as well as industry and just as the railways were altering the whole pattern of both domestic and business life, so the high seas were being conquered by the great new steam ships, the wonders of all wonders to those who could recall nothing but the vagaries of sail.

Nearly a century before the great engineering enterprise of Mulberry Harbour during the Second World War, the ' Gazette ' was able to report on a far-fetched, but far-sighted plan by an unfortunately named civil engineer called Mr Daft who had worked for th teen years on a project which had many features anticipating its great 20th century successor.

Attention to Mr Daft's enterprise had been secured by the difficulties which had occurred in the Crimea owing to the deep draught of battle ships. Described as a 'complete revolution in the existing system of naval architecture ' the (Gazette) said that to many the scheme might appear utterly wild and impracticable ('but some may nevertheless trace in it material for useful reflection.')

' It is proposed that a great raft should be constructed composed of 300 pontoon-shaped iron boats, nearly all 100 feet long and ten feet wide and 7 feet deep, having semi circular bottoms . The sides would be flanged on the edges or gunwhales and with 15 of these placed longtitudenally the length of the raft would be 1500 feet and 20 boats in breadth, with a five feet span between each, would give a total width of 300 feet. Thus the deck area would be little short of 10 acres

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The pontoon boats would be banded together by diagonal tie bars bolted to the flanges, heavy hatchways leading into each of the boats would furnish accommodation and storage for passengers and goods.
' It is proposed by the bold projector of the new leviathon to propel her by 22 steam engines of at least 200 horse power each, eleven on each side of the raft, paddles and screws fixed alternately The estimate for freight carried is 20,000 tons Perfectly safe and steady, the raft could attain a speed of 15 knots an hour and draw only 3ft 6 " of water the sur ace acting as a break-water in the roughest sea, so it would be impossible to founder , and in case of running aground it could easily be drawn off by the power of its engines.'

It was reported in the ' Gazette' issue of September 5 1855 that The 'Great Britain' screw steamship had left its moorings in the Mersey and was proceeding to sea. ' This leviathon of the deep has on board a very precious freight of 1,000 souls , plus 500 tons of projectiles 5803 shells , 35 huts, 22 horses, 44 officers and 881 rank and file from detachments of the Dragoons , Hussars and Grenadier Guards .'
A few of the military personnel were to be landed at Gibraltar and Malta and the ship was also to call at Constantinople to deliver £1,500,000 in bullion for the Turkish Loan but the bulk of its human cargo was destined for the battlefields of the Crimea .
The 'Great Britain' was one of the great ships built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and had been launched in 1846 but came to grief on her fifth voyage, running aground on the coast of Ireland .Although eventually reclaimed,the disaster caused the bankruptcy of her owners. In 1850 she was sold to the Gibbs Bright Co and carried immigrants and bullion to Australia before becoming a troopship . After an ignominious old age as a storage hulk in the 1930s she was happily restored and is now berthed at Bristol.
In the Summer of 1855 the public was all agog at the statistics of an even greater ship the huge 'Leviathon' just beginning to take shape in London docks . In his ' Informative Paragraphs ' Strutt reminded his readers that even the largest of the English battleships was something under 400 tons and 220 feet in length while this mighty new giant of the ocean was nearly three times that length and 2,500 tons.

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The screw combined with the paddles would be worked by engines normally of 2,500 horse power but capable of 10,000 . To guard against accident at sea and prevent any detention from such cause the paddle wheels would be designed to work separately from each other and operated by different sets of machinery .Steam would be the sole propelling power, with no canvas being contemplated and her average speed would be 15 knots in all weather. It was thought that the company intended to make the new ship's first voyage to Australia and her load of 20,000 tons of coal would allow the whole journey to be completed in 32 days without refuelling . A trial trip to the United States was planned with 1,000 passengers, who would make the journey in less than a fortnight.

The ships huge fuel load may have encouraged concern among those who feared that the new uses of steam might cause Britains coal stocks to eventually run out, but the ' Gazette ' was quick to re-assure them on that score. The extent of the coal area in Northumberland and Durham, they said, was 500,000acres , its total content amounting to no less than 1,000,000,000 tons of coal of which only 1,500,000 had been worked. The present annual consumption was estimated at 10,000 000 ton so it followed that at this rate it would take eight centuries to exhaust this single field .

The Leviathon , or ' Great Eastern ' as she was eventually named, was the result of a joint venture by Brunel and John Scott Russell, co-founder of the 1851 Exhibition , a civil engineer and naval architect . Holding the reputation of being the most brilliant marine engineer of his day he shared Brunel's enthusiasm for this venture and helped to raise the vast sum needed, Brunel himself sinking most of his fortune in it. The ship was to be built at Scott Russells own Napier Yard in London but relations soured between the two men even before construction started and in the new year, 1855, financial problems arose, causing a lot of personal haggling and recrimination. On one occasion Brunel replied to a letter from Russell signed ' your obedient servant ' ;....' I wish you were my obedient servant, I should begin with a little flogging ' '

The ' Great Eastern ' was not launched until November 1857, and this was a dismal failure in the presence of huge crowds of people who saw the ship move only a few feet , Many more attempts had to be made before it was eventually floated in January 1858. On her first sea trials in Septemebr of the same year the great ship was sailing past the Nore when due to an error in the operating of the stopcocks an explosion shattered one of the funnels, killing men in the boiler room and a number of engineers. The news was broken to Brunel, already

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suffering from the result of a stroke, and he died a few days later, broken hearted.

Such were the risks of great ventures , both physical and financial and the Victorians were ever ready to risk all in the cause of progress doctors and surgeons experimented on themselves, explorers, many of them women, took themselves off on expeditions which would be foolhardy even today, such was their faith in themselves and in God.