



ART ON THE  
UNDERGROUND

# Pond Life:

Albertopolis and the Lily

Monster Chetwynd

MAYOR  
OF LONDON

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**Monster Chetwynd**  
**'Pond Life: Albertopolis and the Lily'**  
May 2023–2024

'Pond Life: Albertopolis and the Lily' is a new artwork at Gloucester Road station by British artist Monster Chetwynd. The sculptural intervention takes inspiration from the Crystal Palace's radical, modular design, which was based on the Amazonian waterlily's elaborate network of ribbed veins.

Monster Chetwynd is known for her energetic artworks that defy easy categorisation. She combines historic references, theatrical performances and pop culture to tell stories about contemporary society and morality. Her installation reveals the entwined histories of Gloucester Road station and the vast programme of cultural redevelopment that followed the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Through her research into Gloucester Road station and the surrounding area, Monster Chetwynd became interested in the giant Amazonian waterlily. This was the inspiration behind gardener-turned-architect Joseph Paxton's pioneering, kit-form design for the Crystal Palace. It was a structure which had the greatest area of glass seen at the time, and paved the way for successive public buildings and revolutionised architecture.

At Gloucester Road station, five circular sculptures, each four metres in diameter, sit along the length of a disused platform. They are populated with creatures – beetles, dragonfly larvae, tadpoles and tortoises, which appear to be constructing sections of the Crystal Palace. A salamander, holds an Amazonian lily pad as a parasol, harnessing nature's resources.

A new film by Monster Chetwynd, 'Who named the Lily?' is on view in the station. It celebrates and laments the complicated history of the Crystal Palace. Chetwynd plays the 'Fact Hungry Witch', who explores the story of the Amazonian waterlily, and reveals its links to engineering. She interviews historians and academics, using humour to subvert broadcasting norms and open-up the political implications of the story. The artwork brings to light the politics of Paxton's developments in industry and architecture. However, the protagonist of this story is the waterlily – a catalyst for ground-breaking technological advancement.



'Pond Life: Albertopolis and the Lily' builds on Chetwynd's track record of creating public artworks which juxtapose familiar references, bombastic visuals, and a sense of irreverence. This leaflet provides some historical context to the inspiration behind Monster Chetwynd's artwork. It unties the threads of a prevailing narrative and presents a history that has shaped our city.

Jessica Vaughan, Senior Curator

The full-length version of 'Who named the Lily?' is available to view here:



Written by Sasha Morse, Assistant Curator. The following historical information is informed by 'The Flower of Empire: The Amazon's Largest Water Lily, the Quest to Make it Bloom, and the World it Helped Create' by Tatiana Holway.

Thanks to Alexander Conway, Fraser Muggeridge studio; Henry Moore Foundation; Kerstin Doble; Miranda Lowe CBE, Principal Curator at the Natural History Museum, London and Rachel Moss, Engagement Project Manager (freelance).

**Timeline**

**1814**

The Dutch held colonies of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo are formally ceded to Britain. This area became known as British Guiana and remained under British control until independence in 1966 when it was renamed Guyana. Guyana is an indigenous word meaning 'land of many waters'

**1835**

German adventurer Robert Hermann Schomburgk is commissioned to survey British Guiana and map its boundaries. The area had been notorious for border disputes with Venezuela for years

**1837**

The giant waterlily is noted by Schomburgk in Guyana. It had been known to the indigenous populations for centuries

**June 1850**

Paxton submits his design for the Crystal Palace

**May 1850**

Paxton completes the 'Lily House', a new glasshouse and permanent home for the giant waterlily at Chatsworth

**August 1850**

Construction on the Crystal Palace begins

**1 May – 11 October 1851**

The Great Exhibition is open to the public

**1849**

The lily arrives at Chatsworth and thrives, flowering for the first time in Britain

**1854**

The Crystal Palace is moved to Sydenham Hill in southeast London (known today as Crystal Palace)

**1855**

Construction of 'Albertopolis' begins

**1868**

Gloucester Road station opens

**1936**

The Crystal Palace is destroyed by fire



## Can you help the Fact Hungry Witch?

This detective hunt **is** inspired by the book 'Masquerade' by Kit Williams.

Find the clues hidden in the seven artworks **along** the South Kensington pedestrian tunnel!

Top tip: you might need a pen and paper to help jot things **s** down

1. **L**ook for the **h**idden piggybacking frogs in each of the posters.

2. Collect the yellow letters on each **p**oster and unscramble the letters to create a word that **is** something from the picture.

3. Find the **n**umber in each poster. This will tell you which letter to note down (for **e**xample, if the yellow letters spell the word 'time' **a**nd the number is 3 the letter would be 'm').

4. Collect a letter from each of the seven **p**osters and unscramble the letters to reveal another word. This word will **p**oint you to a masterpiece hidden in **p**lain sight inside the Natural History Museum, not far from the main **e**ntrance. Scan the QR code on the facing page and insert your word to get access to more information.

**Bonus:** Collect the green letters here to spell out a fun fact about the giant waterlily!

## Notes



If you spot any other hidden words in the posters, please contact us at [art@tube.tfl.gov.uk](mailto:art@tube.tfl.gov.uk)

## ART ON THE UNDERGROUND

# Pond Life:

Albertopolis and the Lily

Monster Chetwynd

MAYOR OF LONDON





### Tracing the Lily

This leaflet traces the story of the giant Amazonian waterlily, the inspiration for Monster Chetwynd's 'Pond Life: Albertopolis and the Lily'.

The story of the giant waterlily begins in the waters of the Essequibo River in modern day Guyana in 1837. The lily's arrival in Britain is part of the entwined histories of botany and colonialism. These histories are important to address in understanding the lily and its influence on architectural innovation. This leaflet tells the story of how the lily, with its beauty, intricate self-supporting structure, vast size, and rapid growth, reached far beyond its horticultural limits. The plant captured the imagination of nineteenth-century Britain and inspired a new form of architecture.

The nineteenth century was famously an age of technological advancement and innovation. The ambitions of the British Empire were embedded in the cultural interests of the time. This was seen in the popularity of tropical plants and flowers brought to Britain from distant shores.

As colonialism became an important part of the British economy, colonial ideas and interests were woven into the fabric of the country and helped define this period. These histories can be difficult to address but understanding them helps to create a more complete account of this period. Challenging dominant narratives resets our understanding of the nineteenth century.

### The Lily

The giant waterlily is the second largest waterlily in the world. It was unlike any plant anyone in nineteenth century Britain had seen before and remains an extraordinary botanical wonder to this day. Its floating leaves grow as much as two and a half centimetres an hour and up to three metres in diameter. The submerged stalks on which the lily grows, can reach a depth of eight metres. Each lily pad is exceptionally strong and can support the weight of a child or small adult. Its white flowers bloom at night, emitting a sweet pineapple-like smell before turning pink and closing again. The sweet smell attracts scarab beetles which the lily encloses in its petals so the insects can feed on its nectar before releasing them to pollinate.



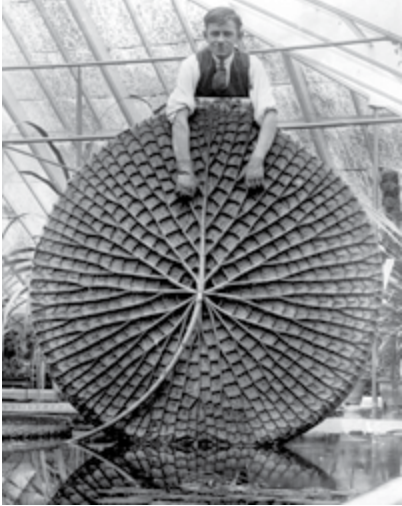
John Fisk Allen, 'Victoria Regia; or the Great Water Lily of America', 1854

Throughout the nineteenth century, adventurers were sent out across the British Empire to survey Britain's expanding territories and its flora and fauna. One such expedition was led by Robert Hermann Schomburgk in the newly acquired colony of British Guiana, now Guyana.

In 1837, Schomburgk recorded his first sighting of the Amazonian waterlily. The extraordinary plant was seen in a remote backwater of the Essequibo River in Guyana.

Colonial narratives often describe how Europeans 'discovered' continents, animals, and plants. This omits that indigenous people had a deep knowledge of their environment which plant hunters and European adventurers came to rely on.

When the giant waterlily was first seen by Schomburgk, it had long been of significance to the indigenous Tupi-Guarani people of the Essequibo and Amazon. The legend of the lily followed the Tupi-Guarani belief that the moon was a powerful goddess who could turn girls into stars. One young girl's greatest wish was to become a star and so every night she would follow the moon. One night she saw the moon reflected on the surface of the river and as she leant over the water's edge, she fell in and drowned. To honour her and her tragic death, the moon goddess transformed her into a star of the water, the giant waterlily.



A leaf of the Victoria Regia waterlily (later named Victoria Amazonica), a plant which grows in the Amazon region in South America. Courtesy Brandstæetter Images / Mary Evans

### The Lily's journey to Europe

During the period of British Empire, plants were collected from across the globe as objects of fascination and the successful cultivation of the Amazonian waterlily in Britain became a fierce competition. There was difficulty in transporting the lily from South America to Britain. Seeds sent in purified water from Guyana germinated at Kew in 1849 but failed to flower.

Sir Joseph Paxton, Head Gardener to the 6th Duke of Devonshire at his Chatsworth Estate in Derbyshire, was regarded as one of the best gardeners of the day. He collected a lily seedling from Kew in August 1849.

### Who gave the Lily its name?

In 1837, when Schomburgk returned to Britain he sent specimens of the lily to the botanist John Lindley for it to be classified and officially named. It was Schomburgk's wish that the lily be named after Britain's new monarch, Victoria and so it became known as 'Victoria Regia'.

In 1901, when the monarch died it was renamed as 'Victoria Amazonica'. It is known variously by the indigenous people of the Amazon basin, as 'Uape Jacana' in Brazil and as 'Irupé' or 'Yakare Yrupe' in Guaraní, the most used indigenous language in Guyana.

### Glasshouses

Sir Joseph Paxton was an influential gardener, engineer, and the architect of the Crystal Palace. The Times described him, in his obituary, as 'the greatest gardener of his time, the founder of a new style of architecture and a man of genius.'

In 1823, Paxton was appointed as Head Gardener at the 6th Duke of Devonshire's country residence in Derbyshire, Chatsworth Estate. At Chatsworth, Paxton built pioneering glasshouses to house and cultivate tropical plants from across the globe. His early glasshouses were made from a kit of glass panels and cast-iron girders. Before the Crystal Palace, his most famous constructions included the Great Conservatory, known as the 'Great Stove', and the Conservatory Wall at Chatsworth. These were forerunners to the contemporary greenhouse.



A collage diagram of a ridge and furrow roof by Monster Chetwynd

The Great Conservatory housed the Amazonian waterlily upon its arrival at Chatsworth. Within a few weeks of arriving, the lily had flowered. By this time, the lily had also outgrown its tank and a new glasshouse was built for it. The Lily House was a refinement of the earlier designs and included a new feature, a ridge and furrow roof. This allowed rainwater to drain more effectively and maximum light to infiltrate the space regardless of how high or low the sun was in the sky. Paxton later said that his design was inspired by the structure of the lily: 'Nature has provided the leaf with longitudinal and transverse girders and supports that I, borrowing from it, have adapted in this building.'

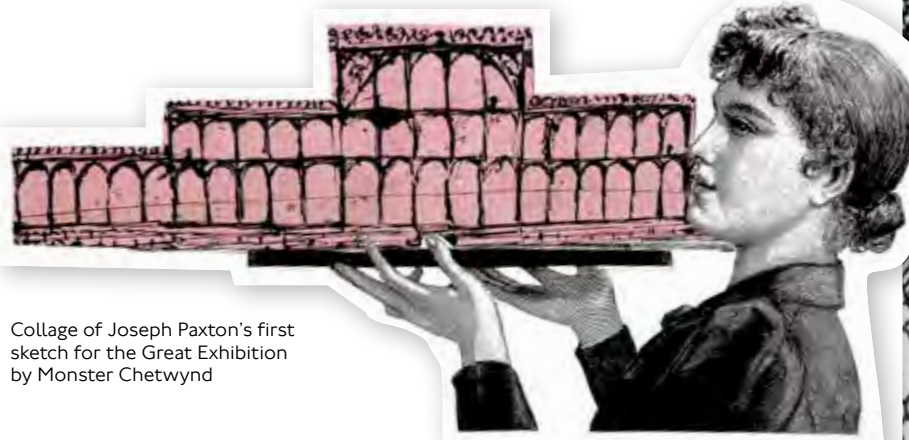
### The Crystal Palace

In 1849, inventor Sir Henry Cole returned from a visit to The Exhibition of Products of French Industry in Paris. With the support of Prince Albert, it was decided that Britain should stage a similar showcase. This would be a celebration of the nation's cutting-edge industrial design and technology and a demonstration of Britain's strength. Underneath this spectacle was an emphasis on colonial power and superiority.

The Great Exhibition, as it would become known, was to be staged in Hyde Park. An opening date was set for 1 May 1851 and an international competition for a temporary structure to house the exhibition was held. The brief was restrictive. The structure had to be vast (covering fifteen acres), inexpensive, temporary, and built in less than a year. None of the 245 submissions fulfilled the brief. The organisers combined the best parts of the submissions to create an incongruous conglomeration of a design which could not be built in time.

Meanwhile, in June 1850, six weeks after completing the Lily House, Joseph Paxton was persuaded by a well-connected colleague to submit a late proposal for the exhibition building.

Paxton surveyed the site at Hyde Park and inspired by the recent success of his Lily House, he realised he could replicate the same glass design 'repeated in length, width, and height, to form [...] a suitable building for the



Collage of Joseph Paxton's first sketch for the Great Exhibition by Monster Chetwynd

Exhibition of 1851'. Within nine days, he had a design for a building which could be erected in just six months, and removed in even less time, with all materials recycled.

Paxton's design was unlike anything anyone had ever seen, and he would later be credited with inventing a new style of architecture. As he was not a trained architect, some of the commissioners resented approving a design created by a gardener. Paxton submitted his design to the Illustrated London News to galvanise public support. The response from the public was so vocal and enthusiastic that no one could prevent its progress.

By August 1851, construction work had begun. 293,655 panes of glass were produced by hand by the Chance Brothers glassworks in Smethwick in the West Midlands. The iron structure was also a product of various ironworks in the Black Country. All these materials arrived

in London by train before being transported from Euston station to Hyde Park by horse and cart. U-shaped roof beams served as guttering which fed into hollow columns allowing water to pass through the building and into the drains below. Paxton also created a ventilation system, allowing cool air into the structure which would be susceptible to retaining the summer heat. With over 2,000 labourers working daily, the structure was complete in less than six months.

At 108 feet tall (33 metres), 1848 feet (563 metres) long and 408 feet (124 metres) wide, the building attracted hordes of admirers. They were dazzled by the sparkling glass expanses before construction was even finished. As the glass structure spread across Hyde Park it was nicknamed 'the palace of very crystal' by playwright Douglas Jerrold in Punch magazine.

### The Great Exhibition

On 1 May 1851, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was opened. 700,000 people assembled in Hyde Park for the grand opening.

Inside the palace, stretching over 500 metres, were 100,000 objects by 14,000 British and international exhibitors. There was a hydraulic printing press able to churn out 5,000 copies of the Illustrated London News an hour, an 80-blade penknife, the 191-carat Koh-i-Noor diamond, a stuffed elephant, a lighthouse beacon, sculptures including one of Queen Victoria made of zinc and a lump of gold weighing 50kg. There were many other thousands of impressive objects and machinery.

With sunlight reflecting off every surface, it was impossible to absorb in its entirety. Charlotte Brontë wrote: 'Its grandeur does not consist in one thing, but in the unique assemblage of all things.'

The western end was designated for Britain and its colonies and the eastern end to the rest of the world. The idea of British colonies being a part of Britain's national identity developed more decisively towards the end of the century.



Interior of the Great Exhibition, 1851. Courtesy Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851

However, the Great Exhibition positioned Britain on a global stage. The image of Britain as a superior industrial force would be utilised to devastating effect in the colonial expansion of the late nineteenth century.

By the time the exhibition closed on 11 October 1851, over six million people had passed through its doors, over a third of the population.



### Relocation of the Crystal Palace to Sydenham

When the Great Exhibition closed and the Crystal Palace had to be dismantled, Paxton raised over £500,000 to relocate the building to Sydenham Hill in South London.

The relocation of the palace and the redevelopment of the area, which is now known as Crystal Palace, was on a much grander scale than even in Hyde Park.

The success of the Crystal Palace endured until a fire started on the night of 30 November 1936. The inferno blazed all night and by morning all that was left were charred remains. At the time, its destruction was viewed as symbolic of the end of an era.



Crystal Palace on fire in 1936. Courtesy British Pathé / Mary Evans

### The Legacies of the Great Exhibition & the Crystal Palace

The legacy of the Great Exhibition and the industrial developments of the Victorian period have shaped London as we know it today.



Gloucester Road station, 1868. © TFL from the London Transport Museum Collection

The Great Exhibition raised £186,000 (almost £15 million in today's money) and Prince Albert decided to reinvest the money in new educational and cultural sites to further British industry. A large area to the south of Hyde Park was purchased and the development of museums including the Natural History Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, Science Museum, and Imperial College began in 1855. The area was nicknamed 'Albertopolis' and two train stations were built to transport the public to the new attractions. These were South Kensington and Gloucester Road stations.

