

A PAGODA IN KNIGHTSBRIDGE

The first Pre-Raphaelite painting to be shown in London was exhibited in 1849 at a gallery in Knightsbridge. This building, known as the Chinese Gallery in 1842 was known as the Hyde Park Gallery in 1848. The name was changed again later to the St. George's Gallery, presumably a reference to the nearby St. George's Hospital. It was known by this name until it was demolished in 1855.

The first title commemorated one of London's most popular 19th century exhibitions -- the Chinese Collection of Nathan Dunn of Philadelphia -- which opened in 1842 and attracted the sort of crowds who in recent years flocked to see the Tutankhamen Exhibition at the British Museum.

A watercolour by George Vawser dated 1847¹ and shown at the Royal Academy is described as a panorama of London from Mr. Hudson's park house at Albert Gate, Knightsbridge. It was drawn from the roof of what was once one of the tallest houses in London, built by Thomas Cubitt and occupied by Hudson the Railway King. The view extends across Westminster with St. Paul's Cathedral in the distance to the left and the towers of Westminster Abbey to the right. It shows Knightsbridge as a wide thoroughfare where the only traffic is a few wagons. Half way along the road just beyond the Wilton Place turning a building in the shape of a pagoda stands by the entrance to Old Barrack Yard. This building, the entrance to the Chinese Gallery, is described in Old Humphrey's Walks in London (1842)² as "a showy China Pagoda of two stories with green roof edged with vermilion pillars bearing on its front a hieroglyphic inscription signifying 'Ten Thousand Chinese Things'." The roof of the gallery can be seen behind it.

There are a number of references to the gallery in R. B. Altick's Shows of London, published in 1878.³ This comprehensive survey describes the variety of shows both instructive and entertaining that were popular in London in the 19th century, including panoramas, dioramas and exhibitions of life and customs from distant countries.

Nathan Dunn of Philadelphia was an American merchant who had resided for 12 years in China where he spent much of his time studying the country. During this period he won the confidence of influential Chinese merchants who assisted him in building up his collection described as "a Chinese world in miniature", illustrating all aspects of life in a country that had kept the outside world at bay for centuries. Dunn's exhibition was first held in Philadelphia where it attracted great crowds. It opened in London in June 1842 and was visited before