

# Henry Hill in London

The young man Henry Hill, aged 26 and a journeyman tailor by trade, disembarked from a steam vessel in London. The year was 1834, just three years before Queen Victoria ascended to the throne and during an industrial revolution in England. It was a time of opportunity.

One of Henry's brothers, and a friend, had waved him goodbye from Topsham, a small town just three miles from Exeter, Devon, on the Exe estuary. Henry and Hill family were from Cullompton, a small town in mid Devon.

An 'old friend' writes in his obituary that Hill 'landed in London [...] with even less than the proverbial half-crown in his pocket. The first few years of his London life were full of anxieties, often of enforced idleness, for work was not always to be had; consequently food was sometimes scanty, but the anxieties never daunted him, nor privation led him to do anything which his father, though long dead, would had disapproved' **(1)**.

Little is known about Hill generally, and even less about his early career. Indeed, most references refer to Henry as serving as Quartermaster in the 1st Sussex Rifle Volunteers - a position he only took up after his retirement from the tailoring trade and move to Brighton.

Six years after arriving in London, Hill was in stable employment and able to marry Charlotte Barrett (also of Devon). This took place on the 13th July 1840 in the Parish church of St Martin in the Fields. His marriage certificate records his profession in 1840 as Tailor, and his residence as 16, Broad Street, London **(2)**.

By 1847 Hill was able to set up his own business, with a partner, as a tailor in Old Bond Street in the West End of London. After the early death of this partner, his brothers, Charles and Edward (who was later to marry the sister of the painter Frank Holl), joined Henry in the business.

This placed Henry Hill, and the Hill Bros. business at the heart of the art market of Victorian England. Galleries and exhibitions and the excitement of the art trade at this time surrounded him. He was one of the new breed of art collectors - the merchants and traders. These collectors were 'encouraged by the example of the Queen and the Prince Consort who bought directly from young painters, the new tycoons followed suit. **(3)**' Hill was no exception, and was one of the new merchant Maecenas, although he kept a close eye on his finances until the business was dealing in credit, and bought most of his collection after his

retirement.

Bond Street in the late 1840's and 50's was a fantastic location to be based as a collector of art. As Jeremy Maas in his book on the dealer Gambart describes it, the West End of London at this time was 'united by one precious bond: quality **(4)**'.

By 1851 Henry (occupation Tailor), Charlotte and William Hill (1822) (Engineers Clerk) were listed as living in Charlotte St, Marylebone. Later again and they are living in Kensington. Business was evidently good.

1. The Western Times (Exeter, England) Thursday April 13 1882; pg. 3; Issue 9973. It is unknown who the 'Old friend' was, but this account provides most of the detail of Hills early life in London.
2. City of Westminster Archive, Westminster Marriages, Birth, Marriage, Death and Parish Records.
3. Jeremy Maas, Victorian Painters Barrie & Jenkins, London (1988) p.164.
4. Jeremy Maas, Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World Barrie & Jenkins, London (1975) Page 28.

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