



Buffalo Bill and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee

Members of the Haywards Heath & District Probus Club and others were treated to a very interesting Zoom talk by William McNaught on 14th April 2021. The subject was Buffalo Bill and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.



Queen Victoria and her Golden Jubilee

In the early part of 1887, Britain was full of expectation. Her Majesty Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India had been on the throne for 50 years – most of that time spent out of the public spotlight in mourning for her husband and consort, Prince Albert who died of typhoid in 1861, aged 42. The Queen was inconsolable with grief at the loss of her beloved Albert, and she wore mourning for the rest of her life. Victoria withdrew from public life after Albert's death but kept up with her correspondence and continued to give audiences to ministers and official visitors.

Eventually, the 68-year-old monarch was persuaded to take a more public role again and what better time to do so than the occasion of her Golden Jubilee in 1887. Plans were made for the whole of 1887 to acknowledge and celebrate one of the greatest reigns in history.

Picture Credit: "Queen Victoria / La Reine Victoria" by BiblioArchives / LibraryArchives is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/).

Victoria's Jubilee was intended to be a very British affair, celebrating everything British: industrial power, artistic achievements, military victories, and Imperial domination. The Jubilee celebrations focussed on the Queen but also affirmed Britain's place as a global power. Soldiers from the British Empire marched in processions through London. Victoria would host a feast, attended by 50 foreign kings and princes, along with the governing heads of Britain's overseas colonies and dominions.

But the USA had other plans. Britain's 'American cousins' planned to celebrate the Jubilee in a unique way, giving tens of thousands of Britons flocking to London for the event a special transatlantic treat – the showcasing of America's own achievements, inventions and resources.

What the Americans planned for London was a unique 'American Exhibition' right in the heart of Britain's capital, showing off everything that they claimed to lead the world with at the time. It was set to rival Prince Albert's own Great Exhibition of 1851, held in Hyde Park. London was told to prepare itself for 'a six-months long celebration of America and its achievements, transplanted three thousand miles from the New World into the heart of an old one.'

Advance information published in British newspapers also revealed that the Jubilee event would include something called: "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Exhibition".

Zoom Talk: Buffalo Bill and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee

Delivered on: 14th April 2021

Given By: William McNaught



Picture Credit: "Buffalo Bill Wild West Show (1899)" by www.brevestoriadelcinema.org is marked with [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The greatest showman of the 19th century.

William Frederick Cody had earned the title *Buffalo Bill* by killing 4,000 buffalo in eighteen months whilst hired to provide meat for workers building the Kansas railway. He then took his show on the road, touring America and Europe with shows which had a Wild West theme with one-hundred-a-side battles taking place between Cowboys and Indians when space allowed.

In the spring of 1887, Buffalo Bill Cody boarded the "State of Nebraska," a massive steamship, along with some 200 performers – cowboys, sharpshooters (including Annie Oakley – see below), musicians, American Indians – as well as 180 horses, 18 bison, 10 elk, 10 mules, five steers and a variety of items for set construction including the old Deadwood stagecoach and materials to build temporary tepees and log cabins.



Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was performed in London in front of a crowd of some 28,000, to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, but on the opening night, the Queen was not there. Impressed by what she learned about the show and after she read glowing reviews, Queen Victoria asked Buffalo Bill Cody for a special performance to be given. Buffalo Bill and his cast of 200 duly complied and gave a 90-minute performance for the Queen and her 25-member entourage – in an arena that could seat up to 40,000 people.

Picture Credit: "Annie Oakley and Buffalo Bill" by [vidalia_ii](https://www.vidalia-ii.com/) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

Next to P.T. Barnum (the founder of the Barnum & Bailey Circus), *Buffalo Bill* was the greatest showman of the 19th century. He pioneered the Wild West Show as a form of popular entertainment on an international scale, laid the foundations for the birth of rodeo, and successfully marketed the myth of the American frontier.

Queen of the Greatest Empire on Earth.

Queen Victoria restored the reputation of a monarchy tarnished by the extravagance of her royal uncles. She also shaped a new role for the Royal Family, reconnecting it with the public through civic duties. She was only 4ft 11 in tall, but Victoria was a towering presence as a symbol of the British Empire. *

* Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/ks3-gcse-history-queen-victoria-monarchy/z73rnrtd>

Sources: • <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/buffalo-bill-s-british-wild-west/> • <https://liverpoolhiddenhistory.co.uk/when-buffalo-bill-came-to-newsham-park/> • <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/researchandarticles/buffalobill> • <https://www.codyyellowstone.org/blog/that-time-buffalo-bill-rode-for-royalty/> • <https://www.historynet.com/encounter-buffalo-bill-at-queen-victorias-command.htm>

About the Speaker: Bill McNaught

(see <https://speakernet.co.uk/speaker/580/bill-mcnaught>)



Bill started work in 1961 as a Westland Helicopters engineering apprentice spending 25 years with the company before moving on to manage a number of other aviation and defence companies. Following retirement in 2008, he moved back to the West Country but in 2014 moved again - to Saltdean, just outside Brighton.

Bill has worked for the Prince's Trust, been Chair of Governors at a local Academy, and sat on numerous committees. Currently, he is Secretary of the Brighton and District Probus Club, Chair of the 5 Deans U3A, and a member of the Rottingdean and Saltdean Lions. His other interests include genealogy and presenting talks on 'fascinating historical characters' which over the years he has given to a variety of organisations including Probus, the WI and u3a. All his talks are fully illustrated using PowerPoint slides.