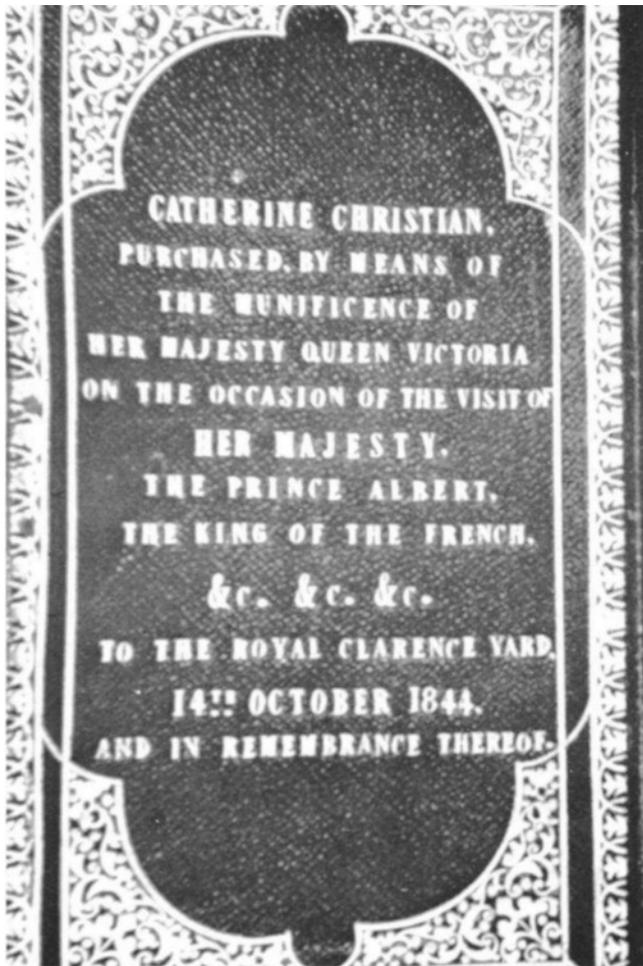


Spring Garden House

By H.T. Rogers O.B.E.

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Strangers probably give the place a cursory glance, and, if they notice it at all, dismiss the whole scene as rather depressing. Yet it is worth pausing a moment to conjure up a very different picture on 14th October, 1844 when it was the new Railway Tavern just erected on the site of the Spring Gardens.

An eye-witness account tells of the hotel staff trying to cope with the hoard of newspaper correspondents who had descended on the coffee room with its polished mahogany furniture and blazing log fire. The hotel was packed with visitors who had come to see the arrival by train of Louis Phillipe, the King of the French, accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Victoria, the Prince Consort, and the Duke of Montpensier. The hotel windows were crammed with sightseers, the stables and yard were full with horses and carriages, while coachmen and ostlers crowded into the Tap-room in Forton Road.

Phillipe 'Egalite', as he was sometimes called, had landed at Clarence Yard in brilliant sunshine a week before and was now about to return to his native land at the end of his state visit to Britain. Having bid him farewell their

Majesties would then proceed to Osborne House in the Isle of Wight.

The hotel was gay with flags, special stands had been set up for the V.I.P's, and a triumphal arch erected over the station gates. The correspondent of the London 'Times' remarked on the multitude of people who had assembled along the route to the Vitualling Yard despite the threatening weather. In later years the railway line was to be extended through a tunnel in the ramparts direct to the pier but today the journey was to be made by coach.

Shortly after 1 o'clock detachments of infantry arrived to take up position lining the road to Clarence Yard and promptly on time the Royal Train pulled up at the arrival platform. There was great excitement as the Duke of Wellington was seen to alight. Presentations were made and then the 'Times' tells us, their Majesties proceeded at once to their carriages followed by their respective suites. A military band played the National Anthem and the Royal Procession moved off amidst the cheers of the populace, through the Gosport Arches, along Weevil Lane and on to Clarence Yard where lavish preparations had been made.

Then came the deluge. The story is often told of how the Royal Party, unable to embark owing to the heavy gale which blew up suddenly, took refuge in the house of Mr. Thomas Grant, the store-keeper at Clarence Yard. There they ate the meal prepared for his private guests who were unceremoniously bundled out of the back door without the Queen's knowledge.



Miss E. Rowden of Alverstoke, a grand old lady of 93, tells me that her great-aunt was a ladies maid at the Grants and had to serve dinner. The Queen congratulated her on the food being hot which she said it never was at the Palace. What the Queen did not know is that during dinner auntie nipped upstairs and tried on the royal bonnet. Later each of the servants received a prayer book inscribed with the Queen's thanks. Mr. Grant was to receive an elegant piece of plate.

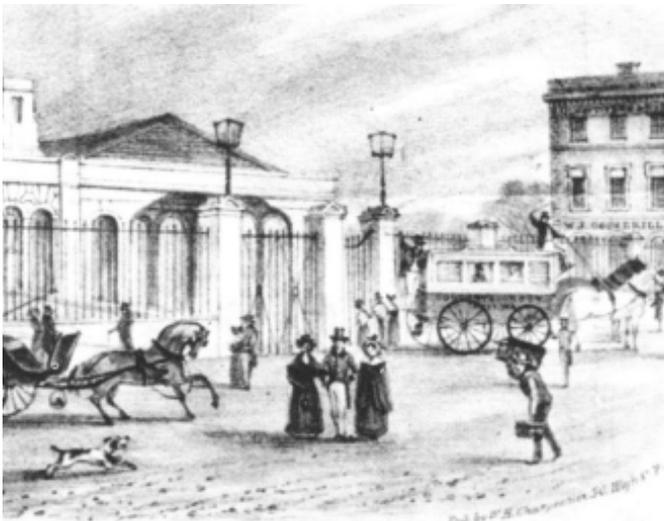
Meanwhile with the storm raging outside, frantic efforts were being made to get the King home by another route.

The 'Times' man reports that 'Officers were running to and fro with orders and counter orders all fairly bewildered and drenched with rain.' Rumour has it that several members of the rather damp entourage of the King of the French sought the warm hospitality of the Coffee room of the Railway Tavern, where, no doubt, the chief topic of conversation was the English weather.

Finally Louis had to return to the station almost unnoticed, without any military salutes, and travel by special train to Dover and over to Calais joined by a dried out and we hope suitably refreshed staff.

Poor Louis 'Egalite'. Within four years he too was to be bundled out of the back door of his Palace to close an inglorious reign by an ignominious flight in a hackney carriage under the rather undistinguished name of William Smith.

The Railway Tavern does not appear to have had much better fortune. Before long it had become a private residence known as Spring Garden House. Railway passengers preferred to cross immediately to Portsmouth by the new Floating Bridge. Commercial Travellers chose to carry their bags along an elm-lined footpath known as Drummer's Walk traces of which can still be seen, to the less expensive Public House in Queen's Road. Only the old Tap-room remained soon to be rebuilt and called the Railway Hotel.



This historic picture of Queen Victoria and King Louis Phillipe at Gosport Station is in the possession of Mr. L. Hayward of Alverstoke who has kindly given permission for its reproduction in the Records.

Spring Garden House was never to fulfil the promise of its early days. In 1915 it took on a new lease of life when for the first time the people of Gosport came face to face with the horrors of war. The cheering crowds as the troops marched to the station to embark for France became more sombre as the ambulance trains started to arrive. Then came the refugees from Belgium. Every town had to take its quota and what better home in Gosport than Spring Garden House. For three years the building echoed to the sound of foreign tongues. Concerts were arranged in the Coffee-room, and the children were billeted out on local schools. Many still correspond with their friends in Gosport.

Between the wars the house had a varied career with more than one tragedy. Soon after hostilities ceased it was to become a Club but once again this was not to last long.

Today with the added indignity of having its fine old entrance bricked up it has become a furniture warehouse and looks somewhat forlorn. Weeds are growing between the railway lines. Soon we are told the planners will be stepping in to plot a new road pattern and nobody quite knows what the future will bring. If you wish to try and recapture that day in 1844 you should go and take a look before it is too late.



It is particularly interesting in that the old arches through the ramparts can be seen in the distance.