

From their early beginnings in the Restoration until the final closure in Queen Victoria's reign, Vauxhall Gardens developed from a rural tavern and place of assignation into a dream-world filled with visual arts and music, and finally into a commercial site of mass entertainment. A social magnet for Londoners and tourists, they also became a dynamic centre for the arts in Britain. By the eighteenth century, when the Gardens were owned and managed by Jonathan Tyers – friend of Handel, Hogarth and Fielding – they were crucial to the cultural and fashionable life of the country, patronized by all levels of society, from royal dukes to penurious servants. In the first book on the subject for over fifty years, Alan Borg and David Coke reveal the teeming life, the spectacular art and the ever-present music of Vauxhall in fascinating detail. In the nineteenth century the Gardens remained a popular attraction, but faced increasing competition from new forms of entertainment such as the circus and the music hall and, with the arrival of the railway, the seaside. Nevertheless, they remained a prominent feature of London life right up to their closure in 1859.

David Coke was formerly the Curator of Gainsborough's House Trust, Sudbury, Suffolk, and Director of Pallant House Gallery Trust, Chichester.

Alan Borg was formerly Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Imperial War Museum, London.