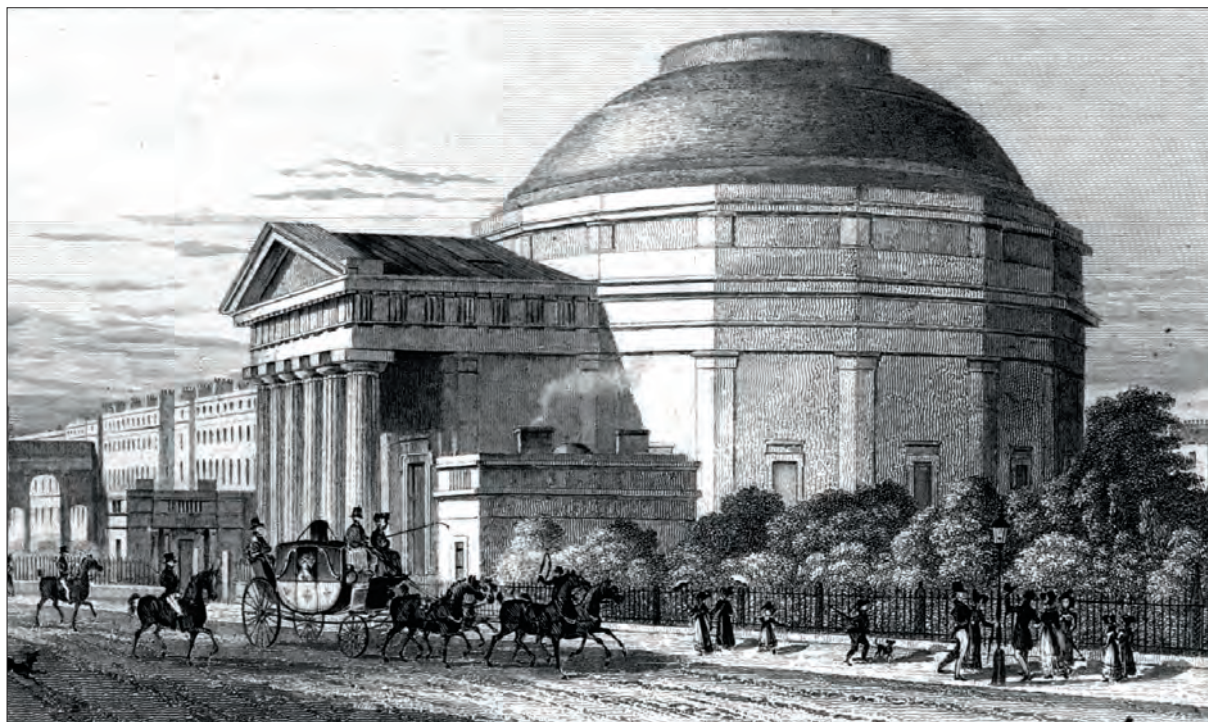


The lift at the Regent's Park Colosseum

Tim R Smith



The 'ascending room' of 1829 at the Regent's Park Colosseum is said to have been the first public passenger-carrying lift in Britain. The Colosseum was built to display works of art, in particular a huge panorama of London, by Thomas Hornor, on the upper floor.¹ The architect was Decimus Burton. A contemporary description of the lift shows that it was a water-balance.

A large bucket or tank of water will be connected with a moveable platform that any number of persons may be placed in equilibrium with its fluid contents, and directly a sufficient quantity of water is introduced to produce a preponderance in the tank the persons stationed on the platform will ascend. The doors of the chamber will then open²

The water-balance was used in industry since it was patented by Michael Menzies in 1750.³ At the Colosseum, water used by the lift was pumped to the upper tank by steam engine. In July 1828, the Times reported that there were problems with the lift mechanism, and the ascending room was not ready until October 1829. It had a circular car that carried six people 'comfortably seated', and was attended by a 'page of tender years'. Most nineteenth century passenger lifts had seats, some described as sofas, and all had attendants. In 1834, the lift was rebuilt by Charles Easton, with a steam engine working through worm gear. In 1843–4 it was again altered, this time to carry twenty people. The Regent's Park Colosseum closed by 1868 when its contents were sold off.

References

1. Ralph Hyde, *The Regent's Park Colosseum*, London 1982
2. J Limbird, *Picturesque Guide to Regent's Park*, London 1829, page 32
3. British Patent No 653, 9 February 1750