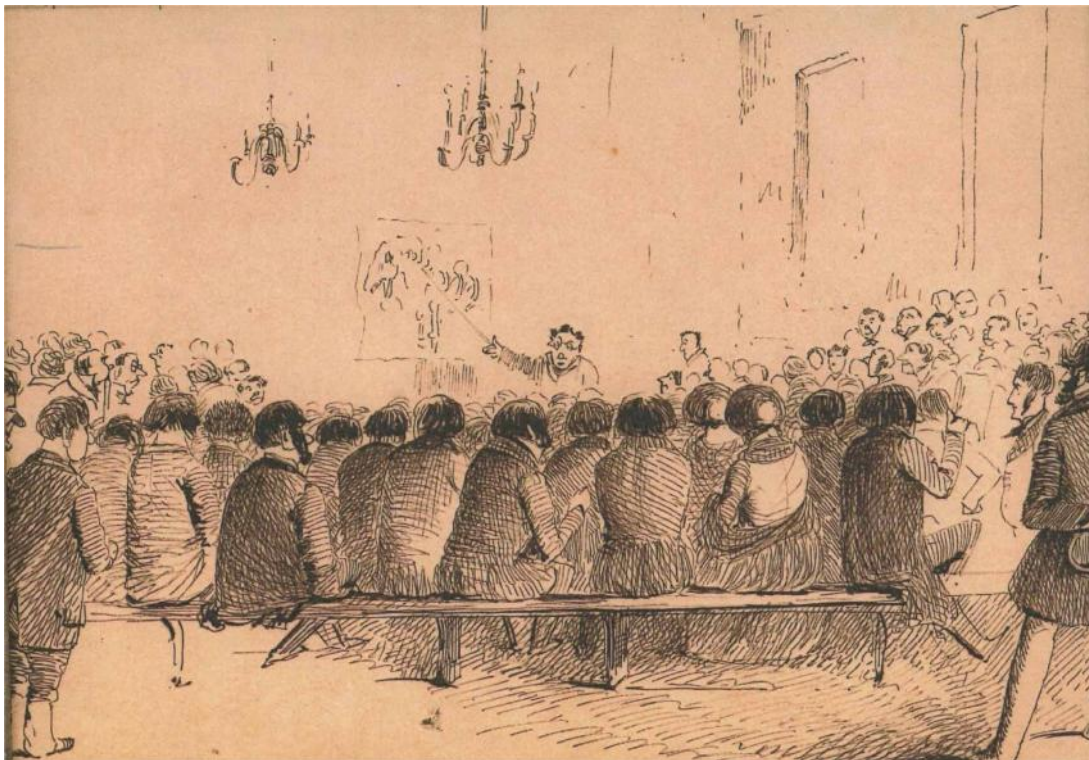
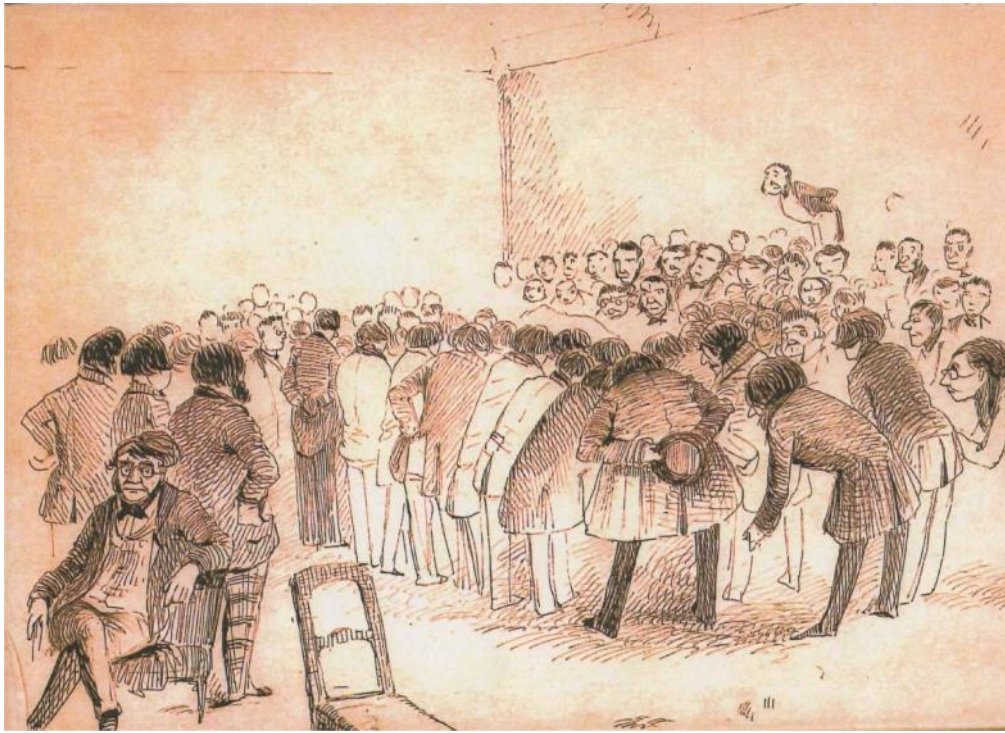


A less formal look at the British Association in 1848

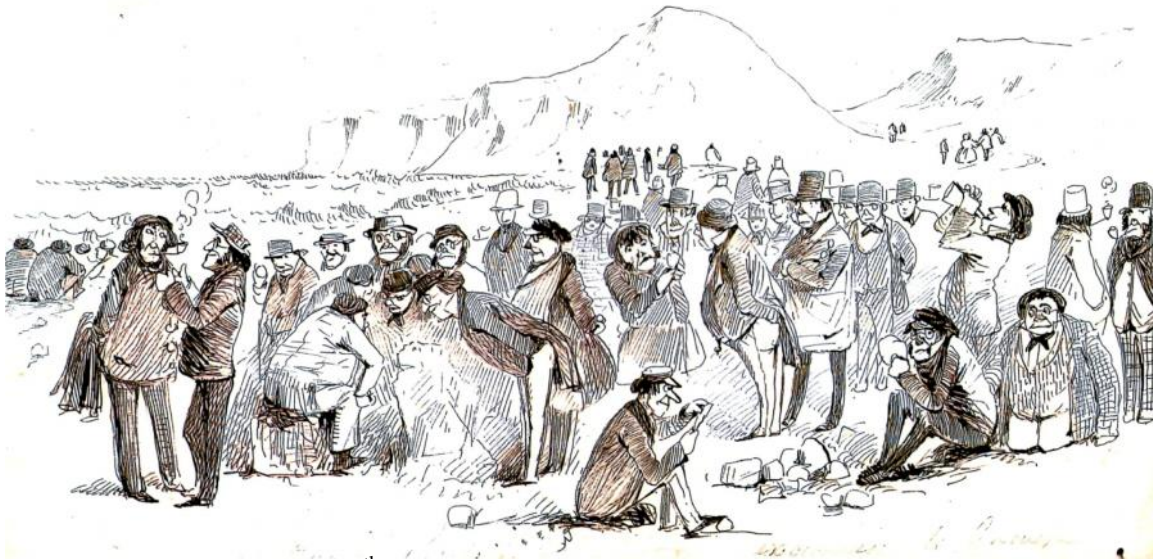
The accounts and portrayals of the gentlemen of the British Association who converged on Swansea tend, understandably, to emphasize their importance and seriousness. John Weir Padley (1812-1886) came of a well-established Swansea family. He was a gifted amateur artist with a penchant for maritime scenes. But he also had an eye for the comic and in the National Library of Wales are some sketches, very much in this vein, which almost certainly portray the scientists in Swansea. Quite likely, at the time, it would have been possible to identify some of these individuals. To us the depictions look full of fun and mischief. To some of the subjects, used to being treated with sombre respect, they would probably have given offence. We can be pretty certain they never saw them.



Swansea Museum (then the Royal Institution of South Wales) was the centre for some of the sectional meetings, and the tall windows on the right may well be those of what was, until recently, its lecture theatre, but now designated Gallery 1, and used for exhibitions. The seating seems to be raked, as it then certainly was, and the chandeliers fit, too. Notice the bonnets on the right – it was commented in the spirit of the time that with regard to the Chemistry meetings “*so many ladies have never at any meeting lent their cheering aspects to the dry details of the Hermetic art*”, (referring back in the most general way to the mysteries of alchemy).



The seated gentleman here is determined to show his unwillingness to crowd around what must be an interesting specimen and peer through gaps or over heads!



The *Illustrated London News* (19th August 1848) records how, on the Saturday of the meeting, “geologists proceeded either by land or water to the remarkable limestone districts of Gower”. Here they are, perhaps at Mewslade.

Thanks are due to the National Library of Wales/Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru for permission to reproduce the drawings. For more on the artist and his work, Pam Williams, “Two Artistic Padleys” and “The Lost Art of John Weir Padley” in (respectively) *Swansea History Journal (Minerva)*. 19, 2011-12, 59-75 and 20, 2012-13, 45-49.