

The Victorian era



The Victorian era is the name given to the period of Queen Victoria's reign. It was a time of significant technological, scientific, economic and social change. New inventions and discoveries were made that changed where people lived, how they worked and how they spent their leisure time. The British Empire grew, and Britain came to rule over a quarter of the world's population. These changes brought immense wealth for many, but lots of people, including many children, still lived in terrible poverty. Many children worked in mines and factories. However, the Victorian era also saw lots more children attending school and significant progress in medicine and health care.



Culture and pastimes

People in the Victorian era wanted to learn more about the world around them. New learning in science was of particular interest and often challenged religious beliefs and ideas. Art galleries, libraries and museums were built in every large city. Some of Britain's most famous authors, such as Charles Dickens and the Brontë sisters, were writing during this time.



Society

The Industrial Revolution, which started in the late 1700s, saw significant growth in steam-powered machinery. The number of large factories making products to trade across the world also grew rapidly. Cities increased in size as people came to work in these factories, leaving the small villages they had lived in behind. The increase in population meant there was a need for more food, goods and housing. As a consequence, urban centres became overcrowded with factories and houses. Very young children had to work too, and it was only towards the end of the Victorian era that the law was changed to stop young children working in terrible conditions.



Main events

- 1837: Victoria became queen
- 1838: Slavery abolished in the British Empire
- 1845–9: Irish potato famine
- 1854: Britain went to war in Crimea
- 1859: Charles Darwin published 'On the Origin of Species'
- 1861: Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, died
- 1867: Antiseptic first used
- 1880: Education became compulsory until the age of ten
- 1897: Women's suffrage movement grew
- 1901: Victoria died



Settlements

The enormous changes in industry seen in the Victorian era brought people from the rural parts of the country into urban centres like Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Bradford. Without access to education, this new working class had to work very long hours in difficult conditions. Children made up a large part of the workforce in factories, mills, mines and workshops. These new towns and cities also became overcrowded, and pollution created significant problems for people's health and



Location



Travel and exploration

Not all Victorian exploration was about trade and conquest. Much of the world was still 'undiscovered' and a source of great mystery. One famous explorer, Mary Kingsley, travelled over much of West Africa, writing about her experiences and collecting scientific evidence of new animal species that she had discovered. Her achievements were even more influential because, as a woman living in Victorian Britain, she would not have been expected to travel in this way. Christian missionaries also travelled far and wide, seeking out people to adopt the Christian faith.

Vocabulary

Empire, Raj, poverty, revolution, consequence, law, conditions, innovations, workforce, economy, representation, parliament, exploration, uncharted, missionaries, achievements