

# Victorian and industrial revolution history essay

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Throughout history, families have changed. Events such as military conflicts, the English Reformation, the rise of the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution have shaped the lives of children (Cunningham, 2005). The prolonged youth that most of us in Britain enjoy today was a luxury few could afford. Children were treated as young adults, with many forced to work as soon as they could walk (Horn, 1997). Factors such as age, gender and social class determined your place in society. Until recent years, women and children had little or no rights with males harbouring most of the power (Higgs, 2009).

This assignment will focus on the family structures, roles and influences that were relevant to a child living in Victorian Britain. It will explore what life was like for families living in this era, the divide between the rich and the poor and dramatic changes that occurred in respect of the Industrial Revolution.

Queen Victoria began her reign in 1837 at the age of eighteen. Three years later she married her German cousin, Prince Albert in a glittering ceremony at St James Palace, London (Smith, 2008). The Queen and Prince were very much in love which was evident in the letters and diaries she wrote.

Together they conceived nine children. However, their life together ended when Prince Albert died, twenty years after they wed (Smith, 2008).

During Victoria's sixty-three years as queen, Britain saw great developments which changed the lives of its people. Inventions such as the easy to use camera in 1857, the telephone in 1876 and refrigerators in 1900 excited Victorian's. Britain became the richest country ever to exist, ruling a powerful empire which covered quarter of the world (Wood, 1994). Between

1841 and 1901 the population grew from 15.9 million to 32.5 million and whereas under half of them lived in urban areas before, now around four fifths did so (Horn, 1997). It was said that all this change was only possible because of the strong family ties which held the country together (Wood, 1994).

Many Victorians followed in Queen Victoria's example and had large families. Census figures from the 1860's show that the average family consisted of six children (Wood, 1994). Having children was considered as the main reason for getting married. Victorians were expected to marry, set up home and raise a family. The poor were expected to marry early while the rich usually waited till they were in their twenties. A middle class man would not marry until he could afford a comfortable home for his family to be (Shuter, 1997). For those who did not marry, their lives were restricted. Working class women were forced to work while some middle class women stayed at home looking after sick or old family members. Florence Nightingale once wrote of her time at home "The evenings never seemed to end- for how many years have I watched that drawing room clock and thought it would never reach ten!" (Shuter, 1997).

Many families had relatives living with them. These were usually older relatives or close members of the head of the house who had fallen on hard times. In most cases, a child whose parents had died was taken in by a relation. If a child had inherited money, it could be used to ensure the child had a comfortable upbringing. Servants were also an important part of the

family life for the better of. They made life possible but were rarely treated as part of the family (Shuter, 1994).

Home life for the rich seemed comfortable and secure. They had many servants, each given a particular role. Their houses were large which each room having a particular purpose (Shuter, 1997). The servants lived in the attic and worked in the basement. They had stairs connecting the two so they could come and go with out disturbing the family. The nursery or school room was also in the attic with the nannies looking after the children.

On the first floor were the main bedrooms and in some homes a large living room where the ladies and older daughters could entertain guests. The bottom floor was the busiest with the hall, parlour, dining room, kitchen and study (Wood, 1994). Unlike today, the kitchens were small and dark and in most instances, hidden back covered by a baize cloth to mask the sounds and smells (Smith, 2008).

Wealthy fathers spent little time at home. After attending to their business, they would spend time with other wealthy men in the country hunting or fishing. The rich women were often bored with little to do. They would occupy their time entertaining guests or visiting friends (Shuter, 1997). The children spent most of their time in the nursery or school room looked after by a nanny or nurse maid. They ate their food in their room, usually seeing their parents for only an hour a day. It was said that rich children were often closer to their nannies than their parents (Wood, 1994).

For the rich, Victorian Britain was a great place to live. They went to theatres, musicals, opera houses and attended lavish charity events. These activities were not only enjoyed by ladies and lords but the new groups that had become wealthy through the industrial revolution. Christmas was also an important celebration. Prince Albert set up a Christmas tree at Windsor castle for the royal children. Others copied in this tradition and soon it became a popular custom all over Britain. Christmas cards, crackers, Christmas pudding and visits from Santa Clause were all started by Victorian Families.

Middle class houses were of similar structure to that of the upper class. However, their homes were generally smaller with all the children usually sharing the same room (Shuter, 1997). The middle-class had fewer servants but still generally had a butler, nanny, cook, a coachman, gardener and many maids. Meal times were often formal gatherings, giving the family chance to meet together regularly.

Like the upper class, the fathers provided for his family. He would work long hours at his business. Middle class mothers worked hard at looking after their families and home, doing handicrafts to occupy their time. As a middle class family, home was the heart of the family. They enjoyed entertaining and relaxing in the home. While the older children did sewing, woodwork or played games such as back gammon, chess, draughts and darts, the younger children made pictures from shells, feathers, straw or wood chip. Children also played games such as blow football, pin the tail on the donkey, blinds man buff and snakes and ladders.

Pianos were also popular in the Victorian days. Even some of the poor homes contained a piano. Families would gather round singing hymns. It was said that a woman who could not sing and play the piano would not find a decent husband.

The Victorians were also a fan of fresh air. The invention of the pram in the 1850's enabled the Victorians to take their children on long walks. Games invented by the Victorians included football, tennis, bowls, croquet, cricket and rugby. Cheap rail tickets saw seaside resorts such as Blackpool and Brighton popular. Even some of the poor could afford trips away although it was not very common.

Schooling methods for the Victorian children varied depending on your social class and gender. Middle and upper class daughters spent the first ten years being taught by a governess at home. Some attended a local day school before finishing up at a boarding school until approximately seventeen. It is thought that the purpose of this schooling was to prepare the daughters for marriage. The private schools the upper and middle classes attended generally small, usually with between six and eight girls. The girls were not allowed to speak to others beneath them in the social scale, talk politics or read newspapers. This was deemed necessary in order for the girl to become a proper lady. During the second half of the nineteenth century, better schools that offered more opportunity were founded such as lady colleges and high schools.

For boys, schools were there to teach them manliness. It was suggested that education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century installed a gender divide bigger than any previous period in history.

Life was not always great for the middle and higher class. Victorian fathers were sometime strict, cruel and uncaring. Women and children were given orders and were expected to obey them. Women had little rights in the eyes of the law. Wood (1994) notes that until 1879 a man could legally beat his wife, until 1881 he could have his wife locked up and until 1882 the husband owned all the property and money.

For the poor, things were different. They lived in cramped, filthy conditions with no running water or privacy. The room had a separate place for cooking, eating and sleeping. Some of the poorest families shared a room with other families (Shutner, 1997). Both the mother and the father worked long hard hours. However, the mother usually worked from home along with the younger children. She was also expected to look after the children and do all the chores. Some of the better of working class families had help if they could afford it. Some paid their neighbours daughters while some had a 'maid of all work'. Here the maid would be the only servant in the house and would have to complete all chores herself (Shuter, 1995).

Some men and women worked in small factories called 'sweat shops'. Here they huddled together and cramped dirty rooms from dusk till dawn for little money. In the 1850's printing had been mechanized meaning books could be printed quicker and cheaper. This gave jobs to over 10, 000 people.

However, the money was bad and they worked long hours. Mining was one of

the deadliest jobs for the working class. The threat of collapse or the pits filling up with poisonous gasses were two of the things the miners had to contend with. Children as young as five also worked in the mines. Some of the people would take a canary with them as it was thought that if the bird stopped tweeting, gas was present.

Most poor children did not attend school. In 1880, a new law stating that all children between the ages of five and ten must attend school. However, most parents could not afford to send their children. It was not until 1891 that the law changed again stating that children between the ages of five and eleven must attend school and it was free for all. Nevertheless poor families could not afford to have their children out of work so for most, they had little time to learn or attend school.

Poor working class children were forced to work from home as young as four. Some families took in washing while others did outwork for factories. This paid approximately two shillings a day (10p in today's money) which was enough to buy essentials such as bread, cheese and milk for the family. Once the children were a little older, they were forced to work in factories, down mines, as servants or as chimney sweeps.

Due to the bad conditions in which they lived, poor working class labourers died young with the average age being only fifteen compared to forty-five for the middle class. Nevertheless, these families were still better off than the homeless who either had to live life on the streets or were sent to the work houses (Wood, 1994).



The poor laws were made to encourage the poor to be less reliant on handouts. This meant that in order to receive food, water and shelter, the poor had to live in workhouses. These were terrible places where unimaginable cruelty took place. Charles Dickens (1812-1870) wrote the story 'Oliver' to highlight the problem. He campaigned throughout his life time to turn people's opinion against these places.

Once in the work house, families were separated allowing only one hour a week to meet. Men, women and children worked all day on dangerous machinery making goods to sell around the world. People were at the point of starvation. What food they were given, consisted of gruel, bread and cheese. Many children were beaten for misbehaving or slacking. Large proportions of the people in the work houses were orphans, the old the sick and the mentally insane. Smith (2008) writes of a scandal at the Marylebone workhouse in London where a number of children ended up in hospital or dead due to their mistreatment. At one point children were forced into work houses along with their mother if they had no father. However, this caused public uproar and the law was changed to allow mothers to claim maintenance from absent fathers.

Most families preferred to live on the streets. Women prostituted themselves and children were forced to steal. Pickpockets were frith in large Victorian towns. Poor children used their nimble fingers to remove goods from the rich. By the late 1890's, people worried that the strong family ties that had once been the heart of all Victorians was beginning to break down and the children were turning to crime. Many prisons were built to try and deter

people from committing crime. The death penalty was given less during this period. However, the hangman's noose was used as punishment for serious crimes.

Before the Juvenile Offenders Act 1847, no distinction was made between an adult and a child criminal. They were tried the same as an adult with reports of children as young as twelve being hanged. This act however, saw that children under fourteen (soon raised to sixteen) were tried in courts for children. In 1854, reformatory schools were set up for offenders under the age of sixteen. These were not nice places to be. The regime was tough with strict discipline and regular beatings. Offenders usually got placed here for long sentences, usually several years.

In 1866, an Edinburgh doctor called doctor Barnado went to London. He witnessed the endless suffering of children who lived on the streets. In 1867, he opened his first of many homes to house and feed the children. Although there was still no family life, the children had food and shelter. This was also a period where many children were mistreated by their parents. Many Victorians were concerned about how to raise their children. Some considered them to be a good and needed to be treated kindly in order to bring the best out of them. Others thought their children were wicked and needed to be beaten to make them obedient. In 1889, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was founded to try and protect them.

Mortality rates for infants were low. The death of babies and infants were a common fact of life that affected all classes. Deaths in the first year were

generally down to diarrhoea, pneumonia and bronchitis while measles and whooping cough became more common in the second year. Between the ages of two and five, scarlet fever had its most fatal impact (Jalland). Although fatalities affected all classes, it was the poor who suffered the most. This was due to the fact the middle and upper class benefited from better diet, sanitation and living conditions. Also, maids usually took care of sick children so not to pass the disease to the other children. Parents could not go near their sick children. Rich mothers were usually sent away with the other siblings and it would be a week before they were reunited.

In overcrowded litter ridden towns, diseases such as typhoid and cholera spread affecting people of all ages. In 1866, 'king cholera' as it was known killed over twenty thousand people. However, as the years went by, improvements were made to clear away health hazards and reduce overcrowding. English doctors named William Budd and John Snow prevented many Victorian deaths as a result of drinking dirty water. They realised that diseases such as cholera were carried in water and encouraged authorities to shut down infected pumps. By 1875, parliament appointed a Health Committee where its job was to inspect food sales, provide sewers, clean piped water and dispose of rubbish.

HOSPITALS. However, the conditions were greatly improved during Victorian times. In the 1850's Scottish doctor Alexander Wood invented the hypodermic syringe which allowed for patients to be injected with painkillers such as morphine and opium to mask out the pain. This and the use of carbolic acid to sedate patients saw a fall in deaths resulting from shock. In

1867 an English doctor named Joseph Lister introduced a carbolic spray which saved many lives. He realised that many deaths in hospital were caused by infection. This germ killing spray saw the death toll in hospitals fall from fifteen percent to forty-five percent.

On the 22nd January 1901, Queen Victoria died. After her death, her second son, Edward, became king. Although the Queen never trusted her son, Edward devoted himself to the country and became well liked by the British public. In 1902, he supported a new law making secondary education cheaper and helped establish old aged pensioners in 1908. Despite this the divide between the rich and the poor continued to grow. In 1910, after only 9 years as king, Edward died. He was succeeded by his second son, George V.