

Victorian England

Take a tour of Victorian England, visit this webpage: <http://logicmgmt.com/1876/splash.htm>

If you need to investigate more about Victorian England for your final-year dissertation, you may find the following websites quite useful:

<http://www.victorianweb.org/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/



Queen Victoria, after whom the era is named. 1837—1901

The Victorian era of the United Kingdom was the period of Queen Victoria's reign from June 1837 to January 1901. This was a long period of prosperity for the British people, as profits gained from the overseas British Empire, as well as from industrial improvements at home, allowed a large, educated middle class to develop.

The era is often characterized as a long period of peace, known as the *Pax Britannica*, and economic, colonial, and industrial consolidation, temporarily disrupted by the Crimean War, although Britain was at war every year during this time. Towards the end of the century, the policies of New Imperialism led to increasing colonial conflicts and eventually the Anglo-Zanzibar War and the Boer War. Domestically, the agenda was increasingly liberal with a number of shifts in the direction of gradual political reform and the widening of the voting franchise.

The middle of the century saw The Great Exhibition of 1851, the first World's Fair, and showcased the greatest innovations of the century. At its centre was the Crystal Palace, an enormous, modular glass and iron structure - the first of its kind. It was condemned by Ruskin as the very model of mechanical dehumanisation in design, but later came to be presented as the prototype of Modern architecture. The emergence of photography, which was showcased at the Great Exhibition, resulted in significant changes in Victorian art.

Events

1832

Passage of the first Reform Act, which gave representation to previously underrepresented urban areas and extended the qualifications for voting

1837

Accession of Queen Victoria to the throne.

1840

New Zealand becomes a British colony, through the Treaty of Waitangi

1842

Massacre of Elphinstone's Army by the Afghans in Afghanistan results in the death or incarceration of 16,500 soldiers and civilians.

1842

The Mine Act banned women and children from working in coal, iron, lead and tin mining.

1845

The Irish famine begins. Within 5 years it would become the UK's worst human disaster, with starvation and emigration reducing the population of Ireland itself by over 50%. The famine permanently changed Ireland's demographics and became a rallying point for nationalist sentiment that pervaded British politics for much of the following century.

1846

Repeal of the Corn Laws. The Corn Laws were import tariffs designed to support domestic British corn prices against competition from less expensive foreign imports between 1815 and 1846. The tariffs were introduced by the Importation Act 1815 and repealed by the Importation Act 1846. These laws are often viewed as examples of British mercantilism, and their abolition marked a significant step towards free trade. The Corn Laws enhanced the profits and political power associated with land ownership.

1848

Death of around 2,000 people a week in a cholera epidemic.

1850

Restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain.

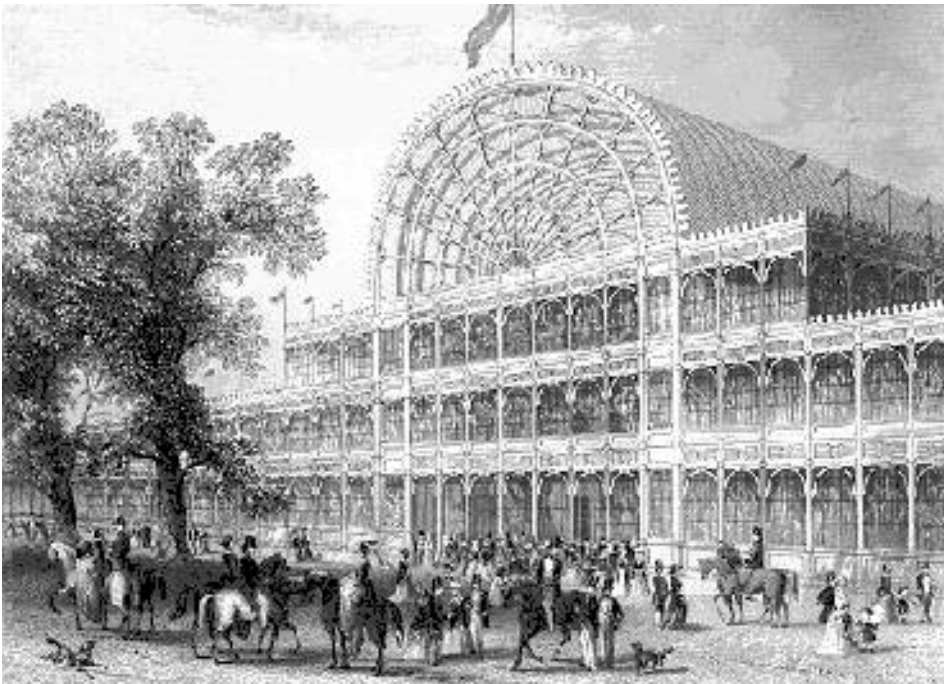
1851

The Great Exhibition (the first World's Fair) was held at the Crystal Palace, with great success and international attention.

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations or Great Exhibition, sometimes referred to as the Crystal Palace Exhibition in reference to the temporary structure in which it was held, was an international exhibition that took place in Hyde Park, London, England, from 1 May to 15 October 1851. It was the first in a series of World's Fair exhibitions of culture and industry that were to become a popular 19th century feature. The Great Exhibition was organised by Henry Cole and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the spouse of the city's reigning monarch, Victoria of the United Kingdom. It was attended by numerous notable figures of the time, including members of the former French Royal Family and the writers Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot.



Queen Victoria opens the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London in 1851.



The front entrance of the Great Exhibition.

1854

Crimean War: The United Kingdom declared war on Russia.

The Crimean War (October 1853–February 1856) was fought between the Russian Empire on one side and an alliance of France, the United Kingdom, the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire on the other. The war was part of a long-running contest between the major European powers for influence over territories of the declining Ottoman Empire. Most of the conflict took place on the Crimean Peninsula, with additional actions occurring in western Turkey and the Baltic Sea region.

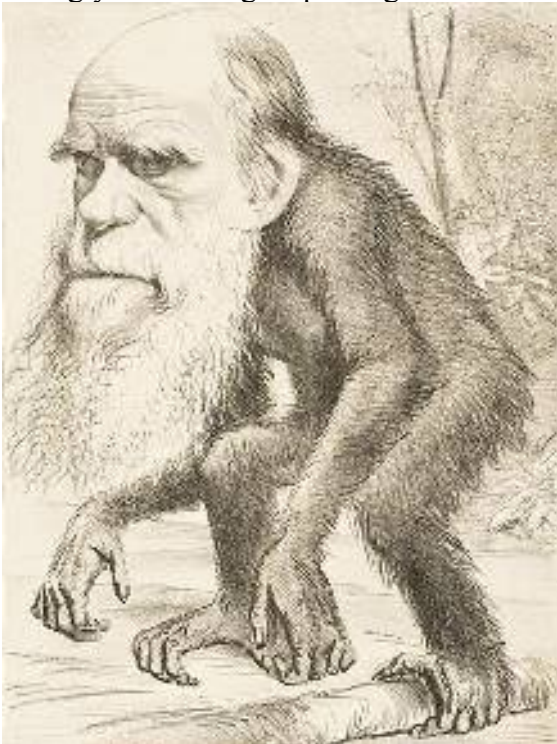
1857

The Indian Mutiny, a widespread revolt in India against the rule of the British East India Company, was sparked by *sepoys* (native Indian soldiers) in the Company's army. The rebellion, involving not just sepoys but many sectors of the Indian population as well, was largely quashed within a year. In response to the mutiny, the East India Company was abolished in August 1858 and India came under the direct rule of the British crown, beginning the period of the British Raj.

British Raj primarily refers to the British rule in the Indian subcontinent between 1858 and 1947; it can also refer to the period of dominion, and even the region under the rule. The region, commonly called India in contemporary usage, included areas directly administered by the United Kingdom, as well as the princely states ruled by individual rulers under the paramountcy of the British Crown. The system of governance was instituted in 1858, when the rule of the British East India Company was transferred to the Crown in the person of Queen Victoria (and who, in 1876, was proclaimed Empress of India), and lasted until 1947, when the British Indian Empire was partitioned into two sovereign dominion states, the *Union of India* (later the Republic of India) and the *Dominion of Pakistan* (later the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the eastern half of which, still later, became the People's Republic of Bangladesh). The eastern part of the Indian Empire became the separate colony of Burma in 1937, and this gained independence in 1948.

1859

Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, which led to various reactions. The most famous confrontation took place at the public 1860 Oxford evolution debate during a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, when the Bishop of Oxford Samuel Wilberforce argued against Darwin's explanation. In the ensuing debate Joseph Hooker argued strongly for Darwin and Thomas Huxley established himself as "Darwin's bulldog" – the fiercest defender of evolutionary theory on the Victorian stage. Both sides came away feeling victorious, but Huxley went on to depict the debate as pivotal in a struggle between religion and science and used *Darwinism* to campaign against the authority of the clergy in education, as well as daringly advocating "Ape Origin of Man".



As "Darwinism" became widely accepted in the 1870s, good-natured caricatures of him with an ape or monkey body symbolised evolution. The beard he had grown during illness and made public in 1866 became iconic

1861

Death of Prince Albert; Queen Victoria refused to go out in public for many years, and when she did she wore a widow's bonnet instead of the crown.



Late 1810s satire on the *invisible*, or poke bonnet

1866

An angry crowd in London, protesting against John Russell's resignation as Prime Minister, was barred from Hyde Park by the police; they tore down iron railings and trampled on flower beds. Disturbances like this convinced Derby and Disraeli of the need for further parliamentary reform.

1867

Confederation of British North America into the Dominion of Canada

1875

Britain purchased Egypt's shares in the Suez Canal^[4] as the African nation was forced to raise money to pay off its debts.

1882

British troops began the occupation of Egypt by taking the Suez Canal, in order to secure the vital trade route and the passage to India, and the country became a protectorate.

1884

The Fabian Society was founded in London by a group of middle class intellectuals, including Quaker Edward R. Pease, Havelock Ellis, and E. Nesbit, to promote socialism.

The Fabian Society is a British intellectual socialist movement, whose purpose is to advance the principles of Social democracy via gradualist and reformist, rather than revolutionary means. It is best known for its initial ground-breaking work beginning late in the 19th century and continuing up to World War I. The society laid many of the foundations of the Labour Party and subsequently affected the policies of states emerging from the decolonisation of the British Empire, especially India. The Fabian Society is a British intellectual socialist movement, whose purpose is to advance the principles of Social democracy via gradualist and reformist, rather than revolutionary means. It is best known for its initial ground-breaking work beginning late in the 19th century and continuing up to World War I. The society laid many of the foundations of the Labour Party and subsequently affected the policies of states emerging from the decolonisation of the British Empire, especially India. The Fabians lobbied for the introduction of a minimum wage in 1906, for the creation of a Socialised healthcare system in 1911, and for the abolition of hereditary peerages in 1917.

1888

The serial killer known as Jack the Ripper murdered and mutilated five (and possibly more) prostitutes on the streets of London.

1870 - 1891

Under the Elementary Education Act 1870 basic State Education became free for every child under the age of 10.

Entertainment

Popular forms of entertainment varied by social class. Victorian Britain, like the periods before it, was interested in theatre and the arts, and music, drama, and opera were widely attended. There were, however, other forms of entertainment. Gambling at cards in establishments popularly called casinos was wildly popular during the period: so much so that evangelical and reform movements specifically targeted such establishments in their efforts to stop gambling, drinking, and prostitution. Beginning in the late 1840s, major news organizations, clergymen and single women became increasingly concerned about prostitution, which came to be known as "The Great Social Evil." Although estimates of the number of prostitutes in London by the 1850s vary widely (in his landmark study, *Prostitution*, William Acton reported that the police estimated there were 8,600 in London alone in 1857), it is enough to say that the number of women working the streets became increasingly difficult to ignore. When the United Kingdom Census 1851 publicly revealed a 4% demographic imbalance in favour of women (i.e. 4% more women than men), the problem of prostitution began to shift from a moral/religious cause to a socio-economic one. The 1851 census showed that the population of Great Britain was roughly 18 million; this meant that roughly 750,000 women would remain unmarried simply because there were not enough men. These women came to be referred to as "superfluous women" or "redundant women," and many essays were published discussing what, precisely, ought to be done with them.

Poverty

19th century Britain saw a huge population increase accompanied by rapid urbanization stimulated by the industrial revolution. The large numbers of skilled and unskilled people looking for work kept wages down to barely subsistence level. Available housing was scarce and expensive, resulting in overcrowding. These problems were magnified in London, where the population grew at record rates. Large houses were turned into flats and tenements, and as landlords failed to maintain these dwellings slum housing developed. Kellow Chesney described the situation as follows: "Hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, make up a substantial part of the, metropolis... In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more people of all ages may inhabit a single room." (The Victorian Underworld)

The Industrial Revolution was a period in the late 18th and early 19th centuries when major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, production, and transportation had a profound effect on the socioeconomic and cultural conditions in Britain. The changes subsequently spread throughout Europe, North America, and eventually the world. The onset of the Industrial Revolution marked a major turning point in human society; almost every aspect of daily life was eventually influenced in some way.

In the later part of the 1700s there occurred a transition in parts of Great Britain's previously manual labour-based economy towards machine-based manufacturing. It started with the mechanisation of the textile industries, the development of iron-making techniques and the increased use of refined coal. Trade expansion was enabled by the introduction of canals, improved roads and railways. The introduction of steam power fuelled primarily by coal, wider utilization of water wheels and powered machinery (mainly in textile manufacturing) underpinned the dramatic increases in production capacity. The development of all-metal machine tools in the first two decades of the 19th century facilitated the manufacture of more production machines for manufacturing in other industries. The effects spread throughout Western Europe and North America during the 19th

century, eventually affecting most of the world. The impact of this change on society was enormous.

The First Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century, merged into the Second Industrial Revolution around 1850, when technological and economic progress gained momentum with the development of steam-powered ships, railways, and later in the 19th century with the internal combustion engine and electrical power generation.

In terms of social structure, the Industrial Revolution witnessed the triumph of a middle class of industrialists and businessmen over a landed class of nobility and gentry.

Ordinary working people found increased opportunities for employment in the new mills and factories, but these were often under strict working conditions with long hours of labour dominated by a pace set by machines. However, harsh working conditions were prevalent long before the Industrial Revolution took place. Pre-industrial society was very static and often cruel—child labour, dirty living conditions and long working hours were just as prevalent before the Industrial Revolution.

Industrialisation led to the creation of the factory. The factory system was largely responsible for the rise of the modern city, as large numbers of workers migrated into the cities in search of employment in the factories. Nowhere was this better illustrated than the mills and associated industries of Manchester, nicknamed "Cottonopolis", and arguably the world's first industrial city. For much of the 19th century, production was done in small mills, which were typically water-powered and built to serve local needs. Later each factory would have its own steam engine and a chimney to give an efficient draft through its boiler.

The transition to industrialisation was not without difficulty. For example, a group of English workers known as Luddites formed to protest against industrialisation and sometimes sabotaged factories.

The Industrial Revolution led to a population increase, but the chance of surviving childhood did not improve throughout the industrial revolution (although *infant* mortality rates were reduced markedly). There was still limited opportunity for education, and children were expected to work. Employers could pay a child less than an adult even though their productivity was comparable; there was no need for strength to operate an industrial machine, and since the industrial system was completely new there were no experienced adult labourers. This made child labour the labour of choice for manufacturing in the early phases of the Industrial Revolution between the 18th and 19th centuries.

Child Labour

Child labour had existed before the Industrial Revolution, but with the increase in population and education it became more visible. Before the passing of laws protecting children, many were forced to work in terrible conditions for much lower pay than their elders.

Reports were written detailing some of the abuses, particularly in the coal mines and textile factories and these helped to popularise the children's plight. The public outcry, especially among the upper and middle classes, helped stir change in the young workers' welfare.

Politicians and the government tried to limit child labour by law, but factory owners resisted; some felt that they were aiding the poor by giving their children money to buy food to avoid starvation, and others simply welcomed the cheap labour. In 1833 and 1844, the first general laws against child labour, the Factory Acts, were passed in England: Children younger than nine were not allowed to work, children were not permitted to work at night, and the work day of youth under the age of 18 was limited to twelve hours. Factory inspectors supervised the execution of the law. About ten years later, the employment of children and women in mining was forbidden. These laws decreased the number of child labourers; however, child labour remained in Europe up to the 20th century.



A young "drawer" pulling a coal tub along a mine gallery

The Victorian era became notorious for the employment of young children in factories and mines and as chimney sweeps. Child labour, often brought about by economic hardship, played an important role in the Industrial Revolution from its outset: Charles Dickens for example worked at the age of 12 in a blacking factory, with his family in a debtor's prison. In 1840 only about 20 percent of the children in London had any schooling. By 1860 about half of the children between 5 and 15 were in school (including Sunday school).

The children of the poor were expected to help towards the family budget, often working long hours in dangerous jobs for low wages. Agile boys were employed by the chimney sweeps; small children were employed to scramble under machinery to retrieve cotton bobbins; and children were also employed to work in coal mines, crawling through tunnels too narrow and low for adults. Children also worked as errand boys, crossing sweepers, or shoe blacks, or selling matches, flowers and other cheap goods. Some children undertook work as apprentices to respectable trades, such as building, or as domestic servants (there were over 120,000 domestic servants in London in the mid 18th century). Working hours were long: builders might work 64 hours a week in summer and 52 in winter, while domestic servants worked 80 hour weeks. Many young people worked as prostitutes (the majority of prostitutes in London were between 15 and 22 years of age).

"Mother bides at home, she is troubled with bad breath, and is sair weak in her body from early labour. I am wrought with sister and brother, it is very sore work; cannot say how many rakes or journeys I make from pit's bottom to wall face and back, thinks about 30 or 25 on the average; the distance varies from 100 to 250 fathom. I carry about 1 cwt. and a quarter on my back; have to stoop much and creep through water, which is frequently up to the calves of my legs." (Isabella Read, 12 years old, coal-bearer, testimony gathered by Ashley's Mines Commission 1842)

"My father has been dead about a year; my mother is living and has ten children, five lads and five lasses; the oldest is about thirty, the youngest is four; three lasses go to mill; all the lads are colliers, two getters and three hurriers; one lives at home and does nothing; mother does nought but look after home. All my sisters have been hurriers, but three went to the mill. Alice went because her legs swelled from hurrying in cold water when she was hot. I never went to day-school; I go to Sunday-school, but I cannot read or write; I go to pit at five o'clock in the morning and come out at five in the evening; I get my breakfast of porridge and milk first; I take my dinner with me, a cake, and eat it as I go; I do not stop or rest any time for the purpose; I get nothing else until I get home, and then have potatoes and meat, not every day meat. I hurry in the clothes I have now got on, trousers and ragged jacket; the bald place upon my head is made by thrusting the corves; my legs have never swelled, but sisters' did when they went to mill; I hurry the corves a mile and more under ground and back; they weigh 300 cwt.; I hurry 11 a-day; I wear a belt and chain at the workings, to get the corves out;" (Patience Kershaw, 17 years old, coal-bearer, testimony gathered by Ashley's Mines Commission 1842)

Children as young as three were put to work. In coal mines children began work at the age of five and generally died before the age of 25. Many children (and adults) worked 16 hour days. As early as 1802 and 1819 Factory Acts were passed to limit the working hours of workhouse children in factories and cotton mills to 12 hours per day. These acts were largely ineffective and after radical agitation, by for example the "Short Time Committees" in 1831, a royal commission recommended

in 1833 that children aged 11-18 should work a maximum of 12 hours per day, children aged 9-11 a maximum of eight hours, and children under the age of nine should no longer be permitted to work. This act, however, only applied to the textile industry, and further agitation led to another act in 1847 limiting both adults and children to 10 hour working days.



Over London by Rail Gustave Doré c. 1870. Shows the densely populated and polluted environments created in the new industrial cities

(adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_era)