

# Victorian Age (1837-1901) Historical Background

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Historical Background

Also known as: Age of Reforms

Named after the reign of Queen Victoria (Last Hanoverian Monarch)

## Characteristics

class-based society.

exploding population.

growing state and economy.

growing no. of people able to vote.

change in the working condition of poor people.

Britain's status as the most powerful empire in the world.

changing worldview (people distancing themselves from Church).

rise of the middle class due to increase in trade between Britain and its colonies.

shift from the Romantic ideals of the previous age towards a more realistic acceptance and depiction of society.

Main political Parties

Whigs (Liberals)

Tories (Conservatives)

Labour Party

## Main Terms

### Victorian values/ideals

morals of the people living during the Victorian era

values related to church, personal success, social behavior

code of conduct specifying how a “proper” woman should behave

Victorian compromise

First used by: David Cecil

Coined by: Lawrence Friedman

Used to label the spirit of the early Victorian Age: G.K Chesterton

refers to the contradiction between the progress brought on by the Industrial Revolution, and the poverty, disease, and suffering felt by the working classes as a result of this progress

## Three Phases of Victorian Age

### *Early Victorian Period (1837-1848)*

period of turbulence marked by economic, political & social difficulties.

Important events: Chartist Movement & Repeal of the Corn Law.

Saw large scale of expansion of railways.

Literature of this period focused on the concerns of the new emerging working class.

Writers: Thomas Carlyle & J.S Mill

### *Mid Victorian Period (1848-1870)*

a period of economic prosperity & colonial expansion

stable stage

Important events: Great Exhibition of 1851, Indian Munity, Crimean's War

saw the appearance of scientific works, which challenged long held religious assumptions

Darwin's The Origin of the Species (1859) & The Descent of Man (1871)

Writers: Charles Dickens & George Eliot

### *Late Victorian Period (1870-1901)*

a period of skepticism, when people began to question Britain's Empire building activities

proposed Home Rule for Ireland.

literature was marked by the Decadent Movement- who aspired to set literature and art set free from the materialistic pre-occupation of industrialized society

Writers: Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson

### **Major Events**

The Great Reform Act (1832, 1867, 1884)

Also Known as: Representation of the People Act

Full Title: An Act to amend the representation of the people in England and Wales.

introduced major changes to the electoral system of England and Wales.

First bill primarily served to transfer voting privileges from the small boroughs controlled by the nobility and gentry to the heavily populated industrial towns.

Second bill extended right to vote to all settled male tenants.

Third bill gave working men in rural England the same rights as those in the boroughs.

### **First Reform Act 1832**

expanded the electorate for the House of Commons and rationalized the representation of that body.

disenfranchised 56 boroughs in England and Wales and reduced another 31 to only one Member of Parliament

created 67 new constituencies

broadened the franchise's property qualification in the counties, to include small landowners, tenant farmers, and shopkeepers. (still could not vote)

created a uniform franchise in the boroughs, giving the vote to all householders who paid a yearly rental of £10 or more and some lodgers

the formal exclusion of women from voting in Parliamentary elections

### **Second Reform Act 1867**

granted the vote to all householders in the boroughs as well as lodgers who paid rent of £10 a year or more

reduced the property threshold in the counties and gave the vote to agricultural landowners and tenants with very small amounts of land

men in urban areas who met the property qualification were enfranchised

### **Third Reform Act 1884**

established a uniform franchise throughout the country

brought the franchise in the counties into line with the 1867 householder and lodger franchise for boroughs

no Voting rights for women.

### **The Factory Act, 1833**

passed to improve conditions for children working in factories

Rights

no child workers under nine years of age

employers must have an age certificate for their child workers

children of 9-13 years to work no more than eight hours a day

children of 13-18 years to work no more than 12 hours a day

children appointed to enforce the law are not to work at night

two hours elementary schooling each day for children under age of 13

four factory inspectors.

### **Chimney Sweeps Act, 1834**

outlawing the apprenticing of any child below the age of ten.

no child was to be actually engaged in cleaning chimneys under the age of 14.

In 1840:

a revised Chimney Sweeps Act raised the minimum age of apprenticeship to 16.

In 1875:

a successful solution was implemented by the Chimney Sweepers' Act which required sweeps to be licensed and made it the duty of the police to enforce all previous legislation.

## Works

'The Water-Babies (1863) a novel by Charles Kingsley, about the gross mistreatment of children in this kind of employment through its central character, Tom, a child chimney sweep.

Chimney Sweepers Friend and Climbing Boys Album' by James Montgomery (1824)

## Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834

Also known as Poor Law

an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed by the Whig government of Earl Grey.

Replaced earlier legislation based on the Poor Law of 1601.

Attempted to fundamentally change the poverty relief system in England and Wales.

Early Law:

The cost of looking after the poor was growing more expensive every year

This cost was paid for by the middle and upper classes in each town through their local taxes.

a real suspicion amongst the middle and upper classes that they were paying the poor to be lazy and avoid work.

In 1834:

The parishes were grouped into unions and each union had to build a workhouse

Families were split up and housed in different parts of the workhouse.

The poor were made to wear a uniform and the diet was monotonous

Children who entered the workhouse would receive some schooling

In return for this care, all workhouse paupers would have to work for several hours each day.

Criticism:

Richard Oastler spoke out against the new Poor Law, calling the workhouses 'Prisons for the Poor'.

## Works

Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist harshly criticizes the Poor Law

## The Chartist Movement, 1838-1848

In 1837, 6 member of parliament & 6 men formed a committee and published the People's Charter in 1838.

Followed by many working class movements for political reform between 1838 till 1848 (together called Chartist Movement)

Phases: 1839, 1842, 1848

People's Charter, 1838

Replacement of Reform act 1832

Demanded parliamentary reform and voting

Drawn up for London Working Men's Association (LWMA) by Thomas Lovett & Francis Place

**Charter had six demands**

1-Vote for all 21 year-old men (universal manhood suffrage)

2-Voting should take place by secret ballot

3-Parliamentary elections every year, not once every five years

4-Constituencies should be of equal size

5-Members of Parliament should be paid

6-The property qualification for becoming a Member of Parliament should be abolished.

**Works**

Thomas Carlyle criticised Chartism in his 1840 long pamphlet Chartism

Condition of England Question, 1839

a phrase coined by Thomas Carlyle in Chartism 1839

describe the conditions of the English working-class during the Industrial Revolution.



a number of Victorian Condition of England novelists, particularly Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, and Charles Kingsley - attempted to persuade the reading public to look for ways of reducing the gap between the "two nations" (Rich & Poor)

inspired social reformers, such as John Ruskin and William Morris.

## Works

In 1829, Edinburgh Review published Carlyle's "Signs of the Times", in which he anticipates the Condition of England Question he raised a decade later in Chartism (1839) and Past and Present (1843).

## Mines and Collieries Act, 1842

Also known as: Mine Act 1842

Supported by: Anthony Ashley Cooper

prohibited all underground work for women and girls, and for boys under 10

## The Great Irish Famine, 1846-52

Also known as Great Hunger, Irish Potato Famine, Hungry Forties.

a period of mass starvation and disease in Ireland from 1845 to 1849.

## Cause

the fungus *phytophthora infestans* (or potato blight), which infected potato crops throughout Europe during the 1840s.

## Consequences

permanently changed the island's demographic, political, and cultural landscape, producing an estimated two million refugees and spurring a century-long population decline.

repeal of Corn Law by Robert Peel in 1846 (England).

## Repeal of Corn Law, 1846

### Corn Law

tariffs and other trade restrictions on imported food and grain ("corn") enforced in the United Kingdom between 1815 and 1846.

word 'corn' in British English denotes all cereal grains, including wheat, oats and barley

kept corn prices at a high level to protect British farming from foreign competition and favour domestic producers

blocked the import of cheap grain by setting a high price

enhanced the profits and political power associated with land ownership.

The first two years of Great Irish Famine there was the urgent need of new food supplies.

As a result, Prime Minister Robert Peel repeal the law in 1846, as a decisive shift toward free trade in Britain.

## Year of Revolution, 1848

Also known as: Springtime of Peoples, Spring of Nations

a series of political upheavals throughout Europe in 1848.

aim of removing the old monarchical structures and creating independent nation-states.

Major contributing factors

widespread dissatisfaction with political leadership

demands for more participation in government and democracy

demands for freedom of the press

other demands made by the working class

the upsurge of nationalism

the regrouping of established government forces.

The Great Exhibition, 1851

Full Name: The Great Exhibition of the works of Industry of All Nations

Venue: Crystal Palace, Hyde Park in London (destroyed by fire in 1936)

Symbol of: British pride and Victorian age.

Organized by: Henry Cole & Prince Albert

Among 13,000 exhibits included a Jacquard loom, an envelope machine, kitchen appliances, steel-making displays and a reaping machine that was sent from the United States.

Six million people visited 13000 exhibits

Broke through class barriers

The Crimean War, 1853-56

First media war

Russia invaded Turkey

Britain, France and Turkey fought Russia

Russia defeated

Set the stage for World War I

Cause

fight was over the right of Christians in the Holy Land (Controlled by the Ottoman Empire)

Britain's and France's unwillingness to let Russia gain more power

The Battle of Balaclava

significant moment because of Charge of the Light Brigade (failed military action involving the British light cavalry led by Lord Cardigan)

Effect

introduction of the highest decoration for gallantry, the Victoria Cross

Works

Tennyson wrote The Charge of the Light Brigade (1854) about the Charge of the Light Brigade at Battle of Balaclava during Crimean war.

Rudyard Kipling wrote The Last of the Light Brigade (1891), which focuses on the terrible hardships faced in old age by veterans of the Crimean War.

Important Figure

Florence Nightingale

## Founder of Modern Nursing

During the Crimean war, Nightingale gained the nickname "The Lady with the Lamp" from a phrase in a report in The Times.

She earned the name "The Lady with the Lamp" because she would visit soldiers at night with a small lantern in her hand.

The phrase was further popularized by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's (1857) poem "Santa Filomena"

## The Indian Rebellion, 1857

Also known as Indian Mutiny, Sepoy Mutiny, Indian First War of Independence, Indian Insurrection

Started by: Mangal Pandey

Place: Meerut, Delhi, Cawnpore (Kanpur), Lucknow, Jhansi

For Britain

Munity of sepoys of the army of the East India Company

Brought to the military defects of the East India Company

For India

First war of Independent

Results

British won

End of Company rule in India

Formal end of the Mughal Empire

Transfer of rule to the British Crown

Birth of Westernized class system in India

## Painting

Eastward Ho! by Henry Nelson O'Neil, depicts British soldiers saying farewell to their loved ones as they embark on a deployment to India

## Works

Tennyson's ballad The Defence of Lucknow (1879), an account of the heroic resistance by the English soldiers.

On the Face of the Waters (1897) by Flora Annie Steel

John Master's Nightrunners of Bengal (1951), a fictionalized account of the Rebellion by a British Captain based in Bhowani, a fictionalized version of Jhansi

J.G Farrell's The Siege of Krishnapur (1973), the siege of a fictional Indian town, Krishnapur, during the Rebellion. (Part of the Empire Trilogy)

Ruskin Bond's A Fight of Pigeons (1978), adapted in a movie named Junoon

Arthur Conan Doyle's The Sign of Four & The Adventure of the Crooked Man

E.M Forster's A Passage to India

## Sanitary Act of 1866

Compelled local authorities to improve local conditions and remove health hazards

Home Rule for Ireland (1870 –End of WW1)

a movement that campaigned for self-government ("home rule") for Ireland within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

dominant political movement of Irish nationalism from 1870 to the end of World War I.

Isaac Butt founded the Home Government Association in 1870.

The bills were:

1886: First Irish Home Rule Bill defeated in the House of Commons and never introduced in the House of Lords.

1893: Second Irish Home Rule Bill passed the House of Commons, but defeated in the House of Lords.

1912–14: Third Irish Home Rule Bill passed under the Parliament Act after House of Lords defeats, with Royal Assent as the Government of Ireland Act 1914 but never came into force, due to the intervention of World War I (1914–18) and of the Easter Rising in Dublin (1916).

1920: Fourth Irish Home Rule Act (replaced Third Act, passed and implemented as the Government of Ireland Act 1920) which established Northern Ireland as a Home Rule entity within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and attempted to establish Southern Ireland as another but instead resulted in the partition of Ireland and Irish independence through the Irish Free State Constitution Act 1922.

Education Act, 1876

Also known as: Sandon's Act

placed a duty on parents to ensure that their children received elementary instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic

created school attendance committees, which could compel attendance, for districts where there were no school boards.

the poor law guardians were given permission to help with the payment of school fees.

## Elementary Education Act of 1880

Also known as: Mundella Act

extended the provisions of the 1876 act regarding compulsory school attendance for children aged five to ten years.

## Medical Act, 1876

enabled every university or other body entitled to grant qualifications for registration to grant such qualifications to all persons without distinction of sex.

## The Boer Wars (1880-1881 & 1899-1902)

First Boer War, 1880-81

Also known as First Anglo-Boer War, Transvaal war, Transvaal Rebellion

War fought between the Britain and Boers of the Transvaal (Dutch colony in South Africa)

War resulted in Britain's accession to the establishment of the Second Republic.

Second Boer War, 1899-1902

Also known as South African war, Anglo-Boer war, Second war of Independence.



War fought between Great Britain and the two Boer republics – the South African Republic (Transvaal) and Orange Free Republic.

British administration over the Orange Free State and Transvaal

Work

Winston Churchill's London to Ladysmith via Pretoria.

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