

Home Life

This section looks at the home lives of Victorian children, including the houses they lived in and the food they ate. It links to QCA History unit 11 - *What was it like for Children Living in Victorian Britain*.

The activity suggestions use contemporary documents, paintings and photographs to encourage historical enquiry, thinking skills and group collaboration. Many of the activities have cross curricular links.

If you enjoy learning about the home lives of Victorian children, why not come along to the Harris Museum & Art Gallery for a facilitated Victorians workshop to find out more?

Comparing the houses of the rich and the poor

Objectives:

- to find out what people's homes were like in Victorian Preston
- to compare the ways poor and rich people lived
- to collect information from a range of sources and draw conclusions about the Victorian period
- to understand that ways of life differed greatly across Victorian society

NC History 2b, 4a, 8a, 11a
QCA history unit 11

Key Vocabulary:

Interior

Exterior

Cesspool

Privy

Terrace

Census

Lodger

Display or give out the images of *A Group of Cottages*, *Whinfield House*, *Singleton Hall* and *A Tea Party*, (**documents 1a, 2,3 and 4**)

Investigate the pictures in pairs or small groups.

- Give the children 2 minutes to discuss one of the photographs. Ask them to note down anything that they notice about the chosen image.
- Ask the children to describe what they can see in the picture. Collect and Write down words that describe what the houses are like.
- What sort of people would have lived in these houses? What evidence in the picture tells you this?
- What can you tell about the surrounding of the houses? Can you guess if they are in the town or in the countryside?
- Decide which pictures show poor and which show rich people's homes and compare them. What are the similarities and differences between them?
- Are all of these four pictures equally reliable as a form of historical evidence? Can you think of why it might be that there are many photographs of rich people's homes but only very few of poor people's? Are paintings showing things as they really were?
- **Use the suggested questions with the individual pictures to develop observation, enquiry and thinking skills.**

Exteriors

Whinfield House (document 2)

- What can you notice about the house, the surroundings and the people in this photograph?
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- What are the people in the picture doing?
- Imagine you are one of the people outside the house. How are you feeling? Think of one sentence this person would say in this moment.

This 'To Let' advert was published in the Preston Guardian on 15th April 1882. What does it tell you about the life style of the people living here?

ASHTON-UPON-RIBBLE, PRESTON.- TO BE LET, for a term of years, the charming residence "WHINFIELD," situate on the banks of the Ribble. The residence contains four entertaining rooms, eight bedrooms, the usual offices, extensive gardens, hothouses, conservatories, vineries, ample stable accomodation, with gardener's and coachman's cottages, together with four acres of pasture land. Whinfield is of recent construction, admirably designed, and one of the most beautiful suburban residences in Lancashire. – For cards to view and terms, apply to Mr. JOSEPH HARDING, Lune Street, Preston.

A group of cottages (documents 1a, 1b & 1c)

Questions for observation and thinking

Look at the image of the houses (**document 1a**)

- The image of the cottages is not a photograph. Do you think this is a realistic picture of the street? How reliable is this image as a historical source?
- What is the big building with the chimneys in the background? What would have been the advantages of living so close to a **cotton mill**? What would have been the disadvantages?
- A row of houses like these is called a terrace and all houses in the row look the same because they are built to the same pattern. Why do you think that is? Do you know houses that look like these? Do you maybe live in a street where all houses look the same? If so, do you know how old they are?
- Count the chimneys to find out how many cottages there are in this group.
- Look closely at the backyards - what do you think the alleyway between the yards is used for?
- What do you think you would be able to hear, smell, feel, see and taste in this street?

Now look at the plan of the cottages and read the description (**documents 1b & 1c**). Clarify any unknown words.

- What can you find out about the state of sanitation in these houses?
- use of the alleyway and what does this tell you about the use of the back yards?
- What does the fact that people were using their privy doors as tables tell you about the living conditions inside the houses?
- Why would people live in these conditions? Couldn't they just move away?

Interiors

Singleton Hall

(document 3)

Questions for observation and thinking:

- What can you notice about the room?
- How big do you think it is?
- What kind of house do you think this room is in?
- What materials is the furniture made of?
- Who do you think the woman might be and what is it that makes you think that?
- How is this house different from your own home?
- Would you like to be in this room?

A Tea Party

Thomas Webster, 1862

(document 4)

Questions for observation and thinking:

- Can you describe the atmosphere in this painting?
- What colours are used? How do they make you feel about the room?
- Are there many decorations in the room?
- What is the furniture like? What materials is it made from?
- What are the children doing?
- Can you see what they are eating and drinking?
- What do their clothes say about them?
- Who do you think the old lady in the corner is?
- Where do you think the children's parents are?
- Is this likely to be a realistic portrayal of children from a poor household?
- What do you think the painter might be trying to say in this painting?
- Does the title of the painting affect how you view it?
- What questions would you like to ask about the painting?

You can find out more about the toys children played with in Victorian times in the Toys and Leisure section.

Did you know: *A Tea Party* was painted for a rich art collector from Preston, the lawyer Richard Newsham. Look out for his name when you study the 1861 census information for Winckley Square.

Activity:

Compare the two rooms and label the things that are the same in green pen and the things that are different in red pen.

Take it further:

To find out more about what it was like inside poor peoples houses read Edwin Waugh's description of a widow's house in Hope Street (**document 10**)

Note: This account was written in 1862, during a time known as the Cotton Famine. Can you find out more about the Cotton Famine? What was it and what impact did it have on the cotton workers of Preston?

Look up any words that you don't know.

Compare Waugh's account with the Whinfield 'to let' advert (**document 7**).

- Underline the words that describe what each house is like.
- Write a 'to let' ad for the worker's cottage in Hope Street.

The people: Using census information to find out how people from different social classes lived

1861 census returns for Queen Street (document 5) **and Winckley Square** (document 6)

Winckley Square and Queen Street are two very different parts of Preston. Use the census to find out more about the people living in those streets. (For more census returns from Queen Street see document 1 in the **Work and School Life** section)

Questions for observation and thinking:

- How many males and how many females lived in the Queen Street/Clarksons Court households? Compare these numbers with those of the people living in the houses in Winckley Square. What do you notice?
- How many of the women in Winckley Square are working and how many in Queen Street?
- Are any of the working women married? Do they have children?
- Compare the jobs the heads of the households in the two streets are doing. What are the differences?
- What age is the youngest working child in Queen Street? What is her job?
- Count how many people live in each house. What are their relationships?
- Why do you think there are so many people sharing one house? Are the reasons the same for people in Queen Street and Winckley Square?
- What sort of houses would people in Queen Street have lived in and what do you imagine the houses in Winckley Square looked like?
- What is Thomas Miller's job? Can you find out more about him?
- Can you think of reasons why the Millers and their neighbours employ servants that mostly come from outside of Preston?

Activity:

- The houses in Queen Street/Clarkson's Court were very similar to the cottages you have looked at already in document 1a. The measurements of the rooms are given in the plan of the cottages (**document 1b**). The front room measures 9'4 x 13'7 (2.87m x 4.18m), the back room is 6'4 x 11'5 (1.95m x 3.51m) and the yard is 11'3 x 13'7 (3.44m x 4.18m). In addition to the ground floor rooms, there would have been two more rooms of approximately the same size on the first floor. Based on the census information for Queen Street/Clarkson's Court, work out how many people lived in each of the houses in 1861. Use string or tape to mark out the size of two rooms on the floor. Work out where all members of the household would have slept and act out a scene in this space.

Discuss it:

Queen Street was a similar street to the one you've looked at in document 1a and it was mentioned in Rev Clay's 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of Preston* as being among the worst streets in Preston at the time.

- Discuss what the impact of the filthy environment and overcrowding might be on the health of the people living in these houses.
- Use the statistics in document 8 and the letter in document 9 to inform your discussion.

(Bear in mind that there are 19 years between the description of the cottages (1842) and the census information (1861). Would things have changed much during this time?)

Take it further:

- Can you find out more about how towns in Victorian times dealt with waste and sewage? Would the conditions have been the same for rich and poor people?
- Imagine what would happen in your street if the rubbish collection would stop and instead of disappearing down a pipe into the sewers your waste water would be flushed into a ditch by the roadside. Why not write a senses poem entitled 'The Great Stink'?
- Find out more about Winckley Square and the people who lived there in Victorian times on www.winckleysquare.org.uk
- Do some research on the jobs servants would have done in the households of rich people. Do you think they would have had an easier life than mill workers?
- Find Queen Street, Hope Street, Winckley Square and Whinfield (Ashton Park) on a modern map of Preston. Compare this map with a map from Victorian times, e.g. the OS First Edition Map of Preston from c. 1890 and/or Brown's Map of 1889 which you can find online at <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/oldmap/>. What has changed?
- Develop a class role play: half the children play people who live in Queen Street and the other half those who live in Winckley Square. Give out roles based on the census information e.g. a widow with five children, a thirteen year old weaver, a cotton manufacturer, a butler, a kitchen maid etc. Let them think about what the people from these two different parts of town would be doing on a typical day. Would they ever meet each other?
- Write a narrative from the viewpoint of a mill owner's child and from a child living in Queen Street.

TEACHER NOTES:

Houses Introduction

There were great differences in how people lived in the Victorian period. As the cotton industry grew, tens of thousands of people came from the countryside around Preston and from places further away such as Ireland, Scotland and the Yorkshire Dales looking for work. The population of the town increased rapidly and thousands of houses had to be built to accommodate the workers. A lot of these houses were put up very quickly and were of low quality, damp and cold. Living conditions were dreadful as there was no running water or adequate sanitation in the houses and often several families shared one house, with each family living in just one or two rooms. Because people lived so tightly packed together diseases spread easily.

The wealthy people, however, built their houses away from the filth from the factory chimneys in the nicer parts of town or on the outskirts.

Whinfield House

Whinfield House was built by the Pedder family on their Ashton estate overlooking the River Ribble. The Pedders had made their fortune by founding the Old Preston Bank but in 1861 their wealth came to a sudden end when the bank ran into debts causing a national scandal. The bank had to be closed and the Pedders had to sell their estate and its contents in order to pay off the bank's debts.

Whinfield House was then bought by Edmund Robert Harris, a wealthy Preston solicitor and one of the town's greatest benefactors, who lived there until he died in 1877. A number of public buildings in Preston, including the Harris Free Library & Museum, are built with money he left to the town of Preston in his will. After this, the house changed owners many times until it was finally demolished. Most of the estate was bought by Preston Town Council in 1937 and is now Ashton Park.

Reverend Clay's report

The Reverend John Clay was a protestant clergyman who worked as chaplain at the 'House of Correction' (now HM Prison Preston) from 1821 until 1857. Clay was a great statistician who wrote numerous reports on the causes of crime and high death rates in Preston. These reports influenced prison and social reform in Preston and the rest of Britain. In 1842 he completed *The Report on the Sanitary Conditions of Preston* which studied the causes of Preston's appalling death rate. He concluded that poor housing, inefficient sewerage, poor water supplies and the build up of rubbish increased the likelihood of diseases and death amongst the lower classes. His report was presented to government and was highly influential assisting the government in reforming public health in Britain's industrial towns.

Cotton Famine 1861-1865

http://gerald-massey.org.uk/waugh/b_cotton_famine.htm

The Cotton Famine was the worst crisis in the cotton industry. It lasted for 4 years and had a devastating effect on the population of Preston and other Lancashire towns.

When the American Civil War broke out in 1861 supplies of raw cotton from the plantations in America virtually stopped. By the end of 1862 most Lancashire mills had been completely shut down. Those mills that remained open only worked for 2 days a week. In Preston there was mass unemployment and extreme poverty.

Thomas Miller and his family

The Miller family rose to have great wealth and influence as the result of the cotton industry. Thomas Miller Senior came to Preston to work for John Horrocks and was a manager of the Yard Works. His son, Thomas Miller Junior was born in the manager's house on the site and grew up to become the manager and then sole owner of the firm in 1846.

Thomas Miller married Henrietta, a niece of John Horrocks, and they lived in Winckley Square with their five children - three daughters and two sons. After the death of Thomas Miller in 1865 the family concentrated on developing their landed estates in Merlewood near Barrow in Furness and Singleton and Thistleton in the Fylde. The eldest son Thomas and his wife Belle lived a lavish upper class lifestyle at Singleton Hall enjoying shooting, golf, tennis, yachting and holiday's abroad.

Glossary of Occupations

SELF-ACTING MINDER A self acting minder watched and minded the 'Self Acting Mule' - the name of a multi thread spinning machine. The original Mule was hand operated and was invented by Samuel Crompton of Bolton in 1779. It was made self-acting by Richard Roberts in 1830.

HOSTLER 1) Stableman, groom 2) repairer of railway engines

ROVER Loaded cotton yarn onto bobbins, giving the yarn a twist, after the Carding and Combing processes.

HOUSEKEEPER A domestic servant

MAID A female domestic servant. They included Scullery, Kitchen, House, General, Parlour, Nurse, Laundry, Lady's, Waiting etc

FUNDHOLDER A fundholder is someone who receives a private income from a benefactor through a fund that has been set up for them, for example an inheritance. This would allow them to live quite comfortably without having to work.

MONTHLY NURSE An attending woman during the first month after childbirth. Also known as 'Confinement Nurse'.

Victorian Diet

Objectives:

- to find out about what food Victorian children would have eaten
- to understand that there were great differences in diet and food consumption between people of different classes
- to think about where food would have come from
- to understand that money and measurements were different in Victorian times

NC Maths 2, 3, 4; Science 2 2a

QCA science: Unit 3a Teeth and eating, Unit 5a Keeping healthy

Key Vocabulary:

shilling

adulteration

Display or give out the Lancashire recipes (**document 12**) and Mrs Beeton's menu suggestions (**document 13**)

Questions for observation and thinking:

- Which dishes do you like, which don't you like? Why?
- How do Mrs Beeton's menus differ from what you eat now?
- Do you think Mrs Beeton's meal suggestions were affordable for everyone in Victorian times?
- Would all the food have been available locally? Where would it have come from?
- Who do you think would have done the cooking in a mill workers' family, and who would have done it in a Winckley Square household?
- Would a mill workers' family have had time enough to eat all the meals suggested by Mrs Beeton during an ordinary day?
- Do you think children would have eaten the same meals as their parents?
- Are these varied and balanced diets by modern standards? **Are they getting their 5-a-day?**
- Think about storage - how would they have kept their food fresh?

Now look at the shopping list (**document 11**). This list tells you about the diet of the mill workers. (Note that this list is from the later Victorian period- during the time of the cotton famine twenty years earlier families would not have had enough money to buy even these basic things!)

- How long would you have to work for a loaf of bread in 1882 and how long today?
- Your wage is ... , what can you buy?
- Do the families have a lot of money left at the end of the week?
- What dishes could you make with the food items on the list? Compare with Mrs Beeton's suggestions and the Lancashire recipes.

Weights & Measurements Quiz

- Which is heavier – 3 stones or 2 quarters?
- Jack has 6 pints of milk and Lucy has 1 gallon - who has more milk?
- If a family of Lancashire weavers has an income of 29 shillings per week, how much do they have in pounds? And how much in guineas?

Take it further

- Record the meals you are eating over the course of a week – how do they compare to the Victorian menu?
- Do some more research on the diets of the Victorian working classes, for example on <http://www.spinningtheweb.org.uk/people/living.php>
- Make a class display of the different types of food and the components of a healthy diet

Teacher Note

Food in the Victorian period

In Victorian Britain access to good food was directly linked to income. At the beginning of the 19th century the food poorer households consumed was often of low quality and not very varied. Adulteration was a serious problem, with a lot of food being contaminated by foreign substances and chemicals that were added to make the products cheaper or look better. For example, water and chalk were added to milk, strychnine to rum and beer, sand and gravel, chicory, carrots and burnt sugar would be sold mixed in with coffee beans, red lead was used to colour Gloucester cheese and even candy sold to children was colored with tinctures of lead, copper and mercury that could rot not only your teeth but your stomach, heart and lungs as well.

Diet of the poor

Preston's mill workers would have had a rather monotonous diet that wasn't overly healthy. Breakfast was often eaten in the mills during a short morning break after the first couple of hours work. It was common to have a little bread and butter with tea or coffee, or porridge made with oatmeal and water for breakfast. For lunch people might have had something hot, like potatoes with a little meat if they could afford it (generally mutton, beef or bacon), or more bread and porridge. There was only little time for lunch so people would prepare their food and either rush home to eat it or have their lunch at work. There is not much information on what mill workers would have eaten for dinner, but in many cases this meal would have been the smallest of the day. After working some 15 hours or more a day people would often not have time or energy to cook or eat when they came home. People tended to have a hot drink, often black coffee, and some plain bread before going to bed and trying to catch a few hours of sleep before the next working day started at 6 in the morning. Working families in the towns often kept a pig or some chicken in their backyards to complement

their diet, but thus contributing even further to the cramped and filthy living conditions in the worker's cottages. Lack of cooking equipment or simply not enough money to buy coals to make a fire for cooking frequently meant that people had to either buy hot food out or make do with cold meals. The situation only improved in the last quarter of the 19th century, when food production and preservation became cheaper and the food that working people consumed increased in both quantity and variety.

Diet of the middle and upper classes

The middle and upper classes would have had a more varied diet. Even a plain family dinner started with soup or fish, followed by meats such as boiled rabbit, roast duck or Irish stew. To finish there were puddings, fruit tarts or cheese. It seems that they ate a lot more than we do today – the average person consumed around 4000 calories a day – but we have to bear in mind that they also had a more active lifestyle than people today, burning those calories simply by doing the daily chores.

Even the better-off families had to manage their households on a limited budget and there were numerous guide books to help the housewives achieve this. Books like Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management offered advice on all parts of running a household, including how to handle servants and how to arrange the table for dinner parties, and most importantly, countless recipes, which encouraged thrift by e.g. incorporating left-overs or making use of all parts of an animal. Cold meat was a very common item on the lunch menu using up the left overs from the dinner of the night before. Often the every day dinners were plain and inexpensive so that the wife could budget enough money to host a monthly dinner party which was important for the family's social connections and hence would be quite lavish with up to seven courses. Storing food for long periods of time without a fridge or freezer was difficult so the food was much more seasonal. Mrs Beeton's family menu suggestions change with the seasons as different foods become available throughout the year.

Children usually ate their meals in the nursery supervised by their nanny. Children's meals had to be 'plain and wholesome' and easy to digest, e.g. boiled meat, potatoes, well-boiled vegetables, boiled puddings, milk, boiled fruit, bread etc. When children did eat 'downstairs', they would have the same food as their parents and were expected to adhere to table etiquette and finish everything on their plate.

