

Life as a child in Victorian Cardiff

Using facts, photos, objects and stories from the Victorian period, you will explore how, and in what ways children's lives were different compared to growing up today.

Cardiff during the Victorian period.

Cardiff grew from being a small town into a busy, industrial port* during this period.

Coal that was mined* from the South Wales Valleys was sent from Cardiff Docks to different parts of the world.

The coal industry and growth of the docks created new jobs and opportunities. This led to many people from different parts of the world moving to Cardiff.

Coal was used for lots of different things. It could be used for fires to heat people's homes, to cook with and to give power to steam trains.



East Dock, Cardiff, April 14th 1883.

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The Victorian period started in 1837 and ended in 1901.

The Victorian period is named after Queen Victoria, who was the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland during that time.

In 1811 there were only 3,000 people living in Cardiff.

By 1891 the population of Cardiff had grown to 129,000 people.

Changes to children's lives.

Conditions and rights of children were very different in the past.

Children from poor and working class families went to work because they had to. They needed to earn money to help their families.

During the Victorian period, new laws were introduced to protect children.

In 1842 & 47 The Factory Act stated that children under 9 years of age could not work in factories. The act also limited children's working hours to 10 hours per day.



School children using abacuses in a classroom.

The Education Act of 1870 made it compulsory* for children aged 5 – 10 years old to attend school.

What do you think school would have been like for children during the Victorian period?

Glossary words*

- **Port** - A port is a place by the sea or river where ships can come and go.
- **Mined** - Coal is mined from the ground. Coal miners dig coal from a mine.
- **Compulsory** - Compulsory means that you have to do it.
Example: There are rules that are compulsory for people to follow.

Activity: Mary's Story

Read Mary's story and then answer the questions.

"Hello! My name is Mary.

It is the year 1852 and I live in Newtown, which is a place in Cardiff near the docks."

"My parents were both from Ireland. They came to Cardiff in the 1840s because they heard people were needed to help build the docks.

I'm the oldest of eight children. I don't go to school because I have to work as a maid. At home, I help take care of my brothers and sisters."



Questions:

- Where in Cardiff does Mary and her family live?
- Why did Mary's parents move to Cardiff?
- What is Mary's job?
- What do you think Mary's life at home is like? Why do you think this?
- How many years did the Victorian period last?

**The Victorian period started in 1837
and ended in 1901**

Activity: My Victorian life

For this activity you will be asked to imagine that you are living during the Victorian period. You will learn about everyday objects and write about your daily life.

Candle holder

Who would have used this?

Candles were important to Victorian daily life as there was no electric lighting until a few decades later, at the start of the 20th century.



Candlelight was used for most ordinary activities throughout the era, from dining and playing games to cooking. Every upper class Victorian household used candles and candle stick holders.

Chamber pot

What is a chamber pot?

Chamber pots were used as toilets in Victorian houses before there was indoor plumbing.



Chamber pots, were nicknamed 'Guzunders'. They were called this because a chamber pot **goes under** the bed. Chamber pots were used for a long time after the Victorian period ended.

Activity: My Victorian life

Carpet beater

What is a carpet beater?

Most commonly known as a carpet beater, this object was a common household cleaning tool, before vacuum cleaners.



What did it do?

When carpets, rugs, clothing, cushions, or bedding were hung over a clothesline, a person would take the carpet beater and hit what was on the clothesline to get the dust out.

What is it made out of?

Beaters were often made of wood, rattan, cane, wicker, spring steel, or wire. Modern carpet beaters are made from plastic or wire.

Copper kettle

What is it made from?

While the lower classes were eventually able to afford tea, they couldn't afford silver. Copper was used instead, because it was cheap, bright and easy to heat. Copper kettles were flat-bottomed to stand on a hob grate or range.



Activity: My Victorian life

Imagine that you are a child growing up during the Victorian period. Write about a day in your life. Try to include some of the Victorian objects in your story.

Example

My name is Ann and I am 9 years old.
I live in the Grangetown area of Cardiff.
I have 5 siblings and my father works in Cardiff Docks.

I live in a terraced house with my family and I share a room with my 3 sisters.
On wash day I help my mother with the cleaning. I use a carpet beater to hit dust out of our rugs.



Carpet beater

My Victorian life