



## The Heritage Family History

### School Records Project

#### Information Sheet 6: The Victorian at Work

When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 the majority of British workers worked in agricultural, so they worked for farmers and helped produce crops and rear livestock.

By the end of Victoria's reign in 1901, some 60 years later, things were very different. It is amazing how so many things changed in her reign and how our society changed from being a rural society, where most people lived in the country, to an urban one where most people lived in towns.

#### **Why and How.**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of machines that could do the work of many men in a far quicker time than men could complete their work. This meant although that fewer men were needed to work on the land because machines now did a lot of the work for them, more people were needed to work in new industries in towns such as the cotton mills where lots of people were needed to operate the weaving looms. This change is often referred to as the "Industrial Revolution". The word "revolution" is used because the old way of life was turned upside down, so dramatic were the changes caused by the new mechanical inventions.

- Look at the census returns for your area for 1851 and see what sort of jobs people were doing. Make a table of the results. Are there any jobs that you have never heard of? If so find out what they involved. Use an internet search engine and search on words such as “dictionary of old jobs” or “old job descriptions”.
- Was your area rural or urban in 1851? Repeat the exercise, this time choosing an area of the country that was opposite of yours, so if your area was rural chose to look at a town or city and compare the jobs people were doing.
- Then do the same using the 1901 census returns and compare the results. How have the jobs people are doing changed?

### **Woman at Work**

Before the nineteenth century, women from the less well off classes had traditionally taken jobs such as looking after children, cleaning, dressmaking and laundering. Before the rise of the cotton mills and factories they often also took on work they could do from home such as weaving. The growth of the number of textile factories increased the demand for labour and many women and children took up these new jobs in the factories.

Alternatively teenage girls would often be found places as domestic workers, helping out in the large households of better off families. This was known as going into service. The girls would be trained to clean the house and help in the kitchen and sometimes also looked after the younger children of a family. If they did well they might rise to become housekeeper or cook, although many left employment upon marrying. The training they had received in service was useful for running their own household after marriage. By the end of the Victorian period women were also taking up positions in offices such as typists and telephonists.

See what you can find out about the invention of the type writer and the telephone or use a search engine to find out more about “inventions of the industrial revolution”.

Women from wealthy families did not usually work. Their role was seen as purely that of wife and mother. Although they were educated, and studied other skills such as singing and playing the piano in order to entertain guests, they were also expected to be able to take charge of the

servants efficiently so that the household was run properly. Some also did charity work to help the poor.

- Look back at the information at your chosen census returns. How many women did you find and what jobs were they doing?
- How many children were employed and how old were they?

### **Work in Factories and Mills**

Conditions in the mills and factories varied depending on how much the owner of the mill or factory cared about his worker. Although many mill workers had a very hard life, working long hours and living in slum conditions, a few were lucky and had employers who were concerned that their workers should live in good conditions.

In 1850 Sir Titus Salt a mill owner in Bradford, Yorkshire moved his mills to the countryside in Shipley. Here there was plenty of water power from the river to drive the mills and plenty of space to build decent houses for his workers. By the time he died there were 800 houses and the new town was called Saltaire (a combination of his surname and the name of the local river). All houses had a least three bedrooms, a parlour a kitchen and a backyard. Saltaire was not the only town built for the employees of one company. These villages and towns are often known as “model villages” as they provided a “model” (ideal) example of housing conditions for factory workers. Don’t confuse them with the model villages that consist of houses in miniature such as Bekonscot or Babbacombe!

See if you can find out more about Saltaire and other model villages others by using an internet search engine. Search on “Model villages”