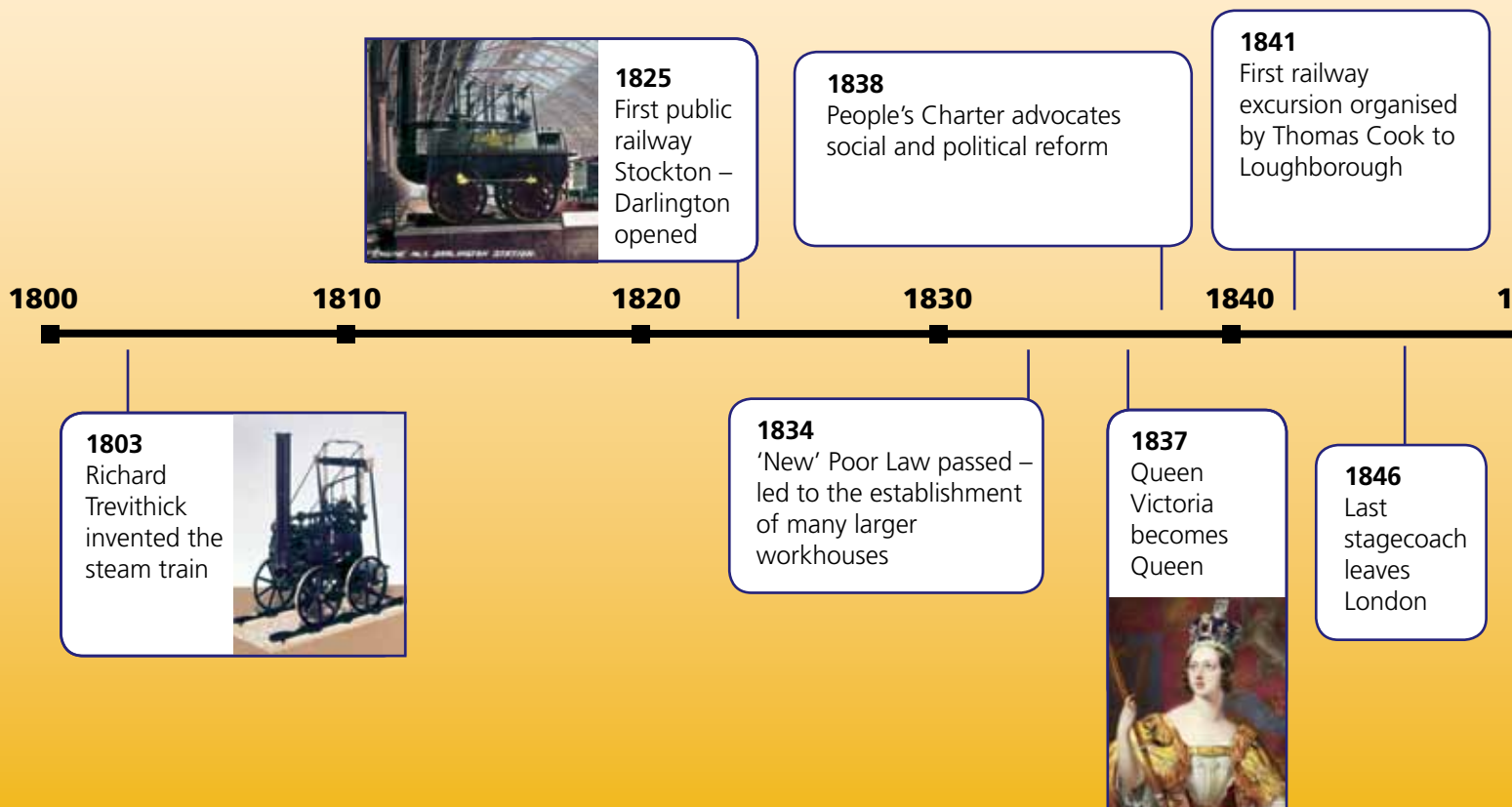


Victorian era time-line



Victorians

Sue Temple

The Victorians is a much-loved unit of work in many schools and some teachers were disappointed to see it had been removed but there are still ways to continue to teach it under the new National Curriculum. In many localities there will be a huge variety of Victorian buildings – including the school itself – so this is an excellent justification for incorporating Victorians into your Local Study.

The Victorian era was also a period of immense changes – in industry, society, technology and the world beyond Britain so it also fits well with the requirement for an extended study beyond 1066. This feature will help you to revise and revamp your planning for this interesting and thought-provoking period of history.

What happened in the Victorian era?

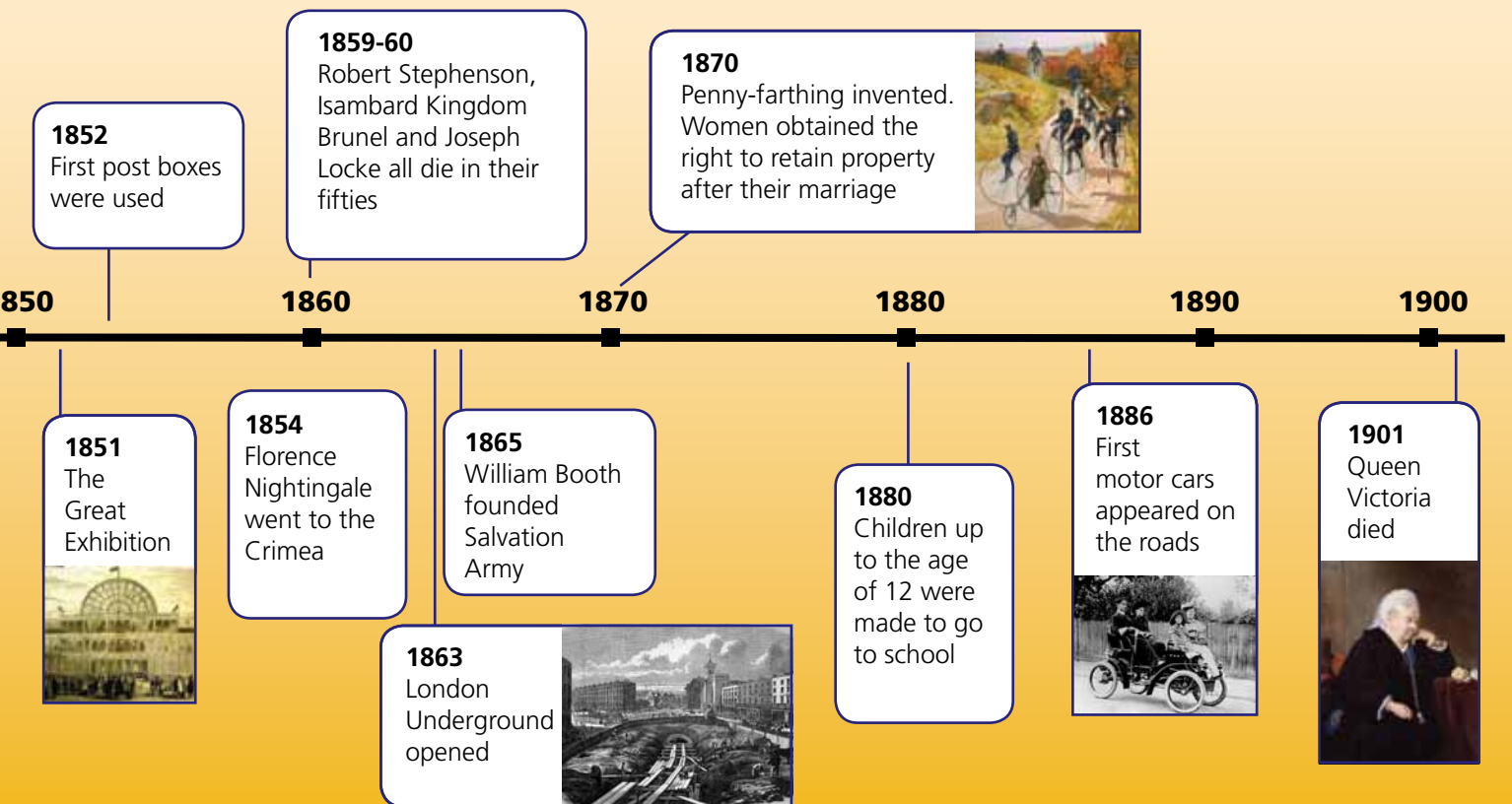
Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 and died in 1901. She gives her name to this era. Victoria married Albert, a distant cousin, but this was also seen as a 'love-match' – more unusual then than now. They went on to have 9 children but Albert died in 1861

and following his death Victoria wore mourning for the rest of her life which gives rise to our image of her as an older lady dressed all in black.

This was a period of great change in ordinary people's lives and historians have identified some important milestones. Britain was then one of the world's first industrialised nations.

The major changes were:

- 1 The population grew.**
Between 1840 and 1900 it increased from around 20 million to 40 million people.
- 2 People at work**
Many of these people, instead of working on the land or making things in their homes or small workshops (cottage industries), came to work in large factories in the towns and cities.
- 3 Factories**
The development of factories was enabled by new inventions, particularly in cotton production, and in the production of power, particularly steam,



produced by the burning of coal. Previously energy was produced by wind, wood, water and animals and most people had worn wool rather than cotton. New inventions also changed life in the home considerably too.

4 The vote

The vote was eventually given to millions of working men. This reflected changes in society in general, in particular for women and children.

5 Women

All classes of women were disadvantaged compared to the men. They had no vote, few property rights and little chance of independence. Once married women were not expected to work but most working-class girls went out to work in the mills and factories or as domestic servants. Divorce was practically impossible. The situation did begin to improve but no women had the vote until after 1900 in non-parliamentary elections.

6 Education

Education was introduced to a much wider section of society.

7 Transport and communications

Transport and communications became faster with the invention of railways.

8 Trade

Britain was a great trading nation with a large navy. This enabled the import of raw materials



for manufacture and the widespread export of manufactured goods.

9 Empire

Britain was also the ruler of a great empire. By 1800 she ruled nearly 400 million people and one-fifth of the world's land surface. This helped her protect her trade but also developed a belief that Britain had a civilising role implying superiority over the non-European people she ruled. The existence of an empire also encouraged emigration to colonies such as Australia and Canada.

10 Migration in Britain

The population also shifted within Britain with the north and Wales becoming prosperous due to the existence of deposits of coal and iron while the south lost some of its importance. Many more people began to live in towns rather than the country.

Teaching the Victorians

There are many suitable themes based on the Victorian era but here we will focus on railways and homes as both demonstrate how an extended study could be developed.

The rapid growth of towns and cities in the nineteenth century and the improvements in communications can be very effectively demonstrated using local maps. The railways were an invention which had wide economic and social repercussions. The first railways were covered short distances and mainly carried coal not people. The first modern railway was the Liverpool to Manchester Railway of 1825 engineered by George Stephenson.

Passenger trains enabled people to travel more cheaply and quickly than ever before. For the first time it was possible to commute to work on the train, or go on holiday away from home even if you were not particularly wealthy. The invention of trams and the general improvement in roads also helped the movement of goods and people.

Suggested teaching activities

1. By comparing two large-scale maps of different dates, town expansion can be demonstrated. The two maps can be used to discuss themes such as:
 - transport (e.g. roads, canals, river and railways);
 - industry e.g. mills and agriculture (farms);
 - other Victorian institutions e.g. churches, hospitals, workhouses, barracks.
2. The two-large scale maps allow investigation of a small area and more detailed changes:
 - the development of farm land for housing, a discussion on sources of employment in a small area;
 - farming, quarrying, soldiering, being a servant in a large house.
3. The use of maps may be integrated with other documentary sources e.g. trade 'directories' which list houses and the jobs of their occupants. Trade directories should be available for your local area either on-line or in local libraries.
4. Using maps, directories and/or census figures, old photographs plus what can now be seen on the ground (see section on street furniture and houses) the children could construct a frieze portraying one street and its inhabitants at a particular moment in the Victorian period.
5. As well as identifying them on the map, railways can still be detected on the ground.

Many larger cities have classic Victorian buildings which are still in existence. They demonstrate Victorian architecture and engineering at its best in that it covered vast spaces using 'modern' materials i.e. iron and glass.

An excellent source for instigating social aspects of the railways is the painting by William Powell Frith called 'The Railway Station'. Much can be inferred from the detail of the painting about the stories behind the people in the picture and the reasons for their journeys as well as the differences between modern and past railways and passengers.
6. One of the heroes of Victorian engineering in general is Isambard Kingdom Brunel who designed both railways and steam ships.

'Famous Victorians' is a good area for individual and group research by children. Their research could be presented as a video programme with a 'This is Your Life' type flavour or radio/podcast interview.
7. While ultimately very successful, there was much initial objection to the building of the railways. The situation was similar to the enquiries into building new motorways today. It was believed that the agricultural land near the lines would become useless and that cows would be too frightened to give milk; canal-owners and workers resented the competition from a new form of transport.

These different points of view would make an excellent role-play of a formal planning meeting, as is done today, using maps, diagrams and proposing different routes.
8. While rather later in the period, *The Railway Children* could be a good introduction to the theme. Poetry connected with railways also exists. e.g. 'From a Railway Carriage' by R. L. Stevenson.

Victorian homes

The rapid growth of industrial towns for the factory workers led to closely-packed, often badly-built, housing which was not subject to any control. The wealthier middle and upper classes built large stone or brick houses often in the newly-developing suburbs.

This industrial housing tended to be the source of much disease. There was no adequate water supply and houses were damp and dark. The spread of cholera, typhus and consumption eventually prompted government control of public health and standards of housing.

Suggested teaching activities

1. Using a diagram of 'back to back' houses, list the disadvantages of such housing e.g. lack of toilets or 'privies', dense occupation, little light and air. Discuss the effect on people's health.
2. Most 'back to backs' have now been demolished but the terrace housing of wealthier Victorians still exists. The larger houses of the more affluent are also quite common.

Using either photographs or direct observation look at the differences between Victorian and modern housing and also at the difference between wealthy and poorer Victorian houses. Census records are useful for demonstrating the differences in the number of bedrooms compared to the number of people living in the house.

Identifying Victorian housing involves looking at the materials, design and structure of local housing and the development of a specialist vocabulary. Estate agents' photographs from local newspapers can be a useful resource to sort and label.

3. Most local libraries and museums have collections of photographs of street scenes for the late Victorian period. Many of these are published collections and are very useful for looking at the evidence of Victorian street-life as well as housing and discussing the changes between then and today.



Resources

Victorian Britain and the Victorian World

<https://www.history.org.uk/primary/module/2482/victorian-britain-and-the-victorian-world>

The Victorians:

<https://www.history.org.uk/primary/module/3422/the-victorians>

Literature

Children's stories from the period that might be useful include:

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

The Little Princess by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

The Railway Children by E. Nesbit.

Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce.

Street Child by Berlie Doherty

Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens.

Many smaller local museums will have handling collections or loan boxes but the large national museums have resource packs and information of great use for different themes available on their websites or through their education departments.



Places to visit

National Railway Museum, York.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Ironbridge Gorge Museum, Telford.

An open-air museum with a vast area of resources on Victorian industry including, packs, books and videos.

Castle Museum, York. Has a large shop and is worth visiting for its reconstructed Victorian streets and interiors.

The National Portrait Gallery, London.

Has slides and postcards of Victorian personalities. Of particular use is a set of four posters and educational notes produced by their education service.

Beamish Museum, County Durham.

Open-air museum which although set in 1911 represents the Victorian era very well.