Historical Association
The voice for history

What can work records tell us about 'ordinary' life in Victorian Wales?

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Addressing Health: Sickness and social reform in the Victorian and Edwardian period

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What can work records tell us about 'ordinary' life in Victorian Wales?

This scheme of learning has been developed under the humanities AoLE for the Curriculum for Wales, and allows students to connect with their *Cynefin*, conduct an enquiry into how 'ordinary' life in Wales has changed over time and develop a broad range of both subject-specific ('working like an historian') and cross-curricular skills in numeracy, oracy and digital literacy. It achieves this using Post Office work records as primary evidence from the Victorian era, and in doing so allows an investigation into the role and significance of both the Post Office itself and the service industry during the late industrial period. It opens up conversations around the impacts of work on health and livelihoods, as well as life and society in Victorian Wales for both men and women. The scheme could be taught at any stage during Years 7–9, or for students aged 11–14, and is linked primarily to progression steps 3 and 4.

Teacher summary

In common with many of my favourite historical enquiries, an investigation into the history of the Post Office allows students to work 'outwards' from a fixed starting point, a bit like a conical lens – the view gets wider and you take in more information (history) as you progress. The details, often intimate ones, of individual stories – in our case found in work and pension records – lead into discussions around how 'ordinary' or 'typical' those details are. This in turn leads to questions about what we can say about life for different groups of people at different points in time, and how these have changed or remained constant when compared to our own lives. If we start somewhere 'small' – and manageable and relatable – we can take our students towards an understanding of a period that is both rich and deep, exposing the 'inner workings' of history as a discipline as we do so. I've come to think of the individual stories from the Addressing Health project as (generally) non-sinister canaries in the coalmine – alerting us not to danger but to something worthy of investigation.

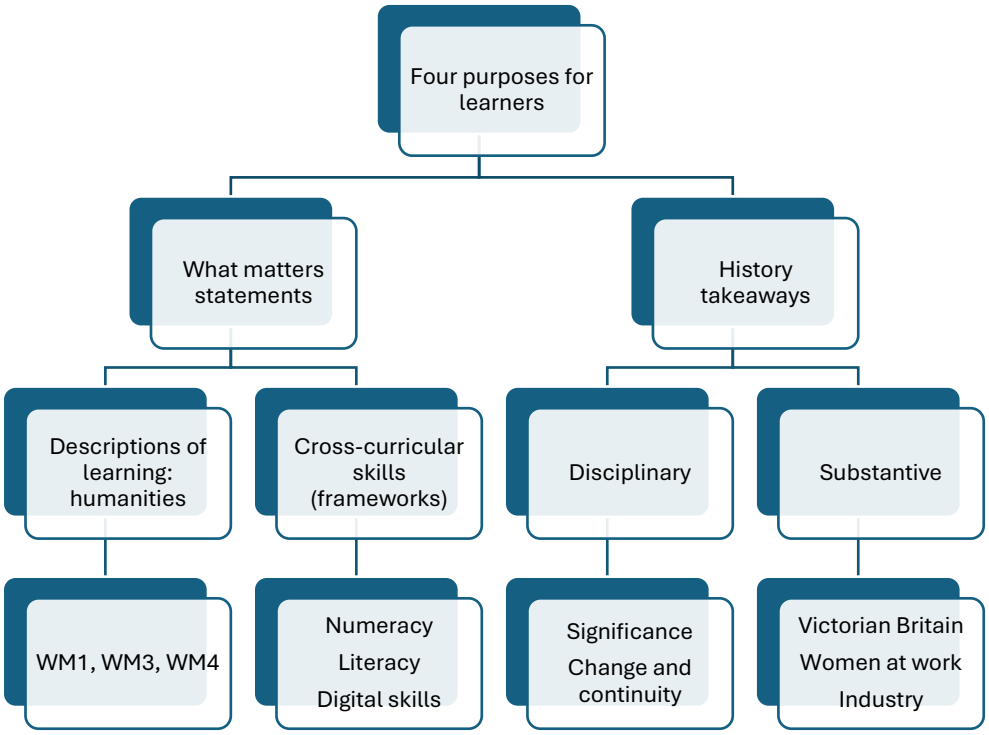
For this enquiry, the 'place' at which the students should end up is Victorian Britain, although not really, as they might have encountered it before. The focus here on the service sector – growing alongside the industries more typically depicted from the era, such as the 'mills and factories' of urban, industrial heartlands – allows us to interrogate lives in both urban and rural places: the different roles, rewards and expectations of work for men and women; the range of environments within which people worked, from offices to doorsteps to railways; and the varied impacts that working conditions had on their health and longevity. Victorian Britain is *near* enough for the students to recognise the basic patterns of their own society and the landmarks and layouts of their environments, but *distant* enough to expose the many ways in which life has changed. I suppose that the 'place', as much for us as teachers as for our students, is also the Post Office itself. Having previously only taught about the institution in the context of savings and pensions as part of 'Britain 1900–1950', I can now see much more clearly the role that it played in connecting people and communities. In many ways, it has long been part of British national identity, interwoven into the values of paternalism and the emerging welfare state, but

also national cohesion and a sense of fairness, through the standardisation of postal rates and provision of services that included the most rural and hard-to-reach parts of the country. It is also reflected in our stories of personal connection and expression – the practice of letter writing and the sending of birthday cards and care packages. Lastly, the Post Office is tied to the most revered of our historical narratives, in terms of the importance of its services and technology during both World War I and II, and indeed tied to the ways in which we teach the Wars; I will certainly teach about censorship or use wartime letters or telegrams with renewed awe and enthusiasm after learning more about what it took to keep these types of communications flowing.

What follows is a set of resources designed under the Curriculum for Wales, some but not all of which will hopefully be useful to those working in settings outside of Wales. It also includes a very local enquiry specific to my setting; although the detail may not relate to your location, it hopefully provides a template that you could adapt based on an individual or a group of people that you discover from the Addressing Health Data Mapper and which resonates with your students. I would recommend in that instance contacting – as I did in Crickhowell – your local archive, who will doubtless have supplementary resources and information to allow you to 'flesh out' your characters in a way that allows them to be a meaningful part of your enquiry, and for students to fully develop the sense of *Cynefin* (or the place that we feel we belong) that runs through the project.

Central to the enquiry is the importance of students working with the Data Mapper themselves, using it to discover information and then being guided towards ways in which that information can be analysed, interpreted and placed within a historical context. Again, the resources included can be tailored to your setting and the data that is most relevant or interesting to you and your students. I have by no means exhausted the list of possible ways in which the Data Mapper can be utilised as part of this and similar enquiries, but have tried to include some thoughts and strategies relating to ways in which the tool could be used to develop both historical understanding and digital and numeracy skills. Through working with this primary evidence and seeing the variety of ways in which it can be interrogated and questioned, students should develop a clear sense of the contingency of history, and of the fact that the answers with which historians end up depend very much on the questions that they set out to ask. Using the Data Mapper also introduces students to the idea of history as a collaborative project, as well as something that not only 'real' historians can do. The crowd-sourcing of the transcriptions needed to make the Data Mapper come to life was something new to me, and I will be keeping my own eyes peeled for what the 'Zooniverse' of citizen science projects can offer me and my students in terms of opportunities to engage with new research.

Planning overview



Key takeaways

- The Post Office was a significant institution in British social, political and industrial life, being central to communication in Victorian and Edwardian Britain and touching almost everyone's lives. It is therefore a lens through which we can examine society at the time, in the later stages of the industrial era and on the eve of World War I and the changes that followed.
- The Post Office is intrinsically linked to the early welfare state, as well as ideals of paternalism and self-help, through its role in the distribution of pensions and savings bonds. It allowed letter writing to flourish at all levels of society through the introduction of the Penny Post and was a physical presence on high streets across the United Kingdom, as well as reaching rural communities and connecting them with their urban counterparts through the postal service. It therefore had a big impact on how people lived.
- The service industry was a growing part of the industrial landscape and employed vast numbers of people, throughout the country and in both rural and urban areas. This shows us that the Industrial Revolution was not all about 'the mills and factories', and that there was a wide variety of jobs that people could hold, each coming with its own hazards and being associated with different impacts on people's health, wages and lifestyles.
- Women were employed in greater numbers and in a wider variety of roles than is often understood, but there were important differences in their rates of pay, status and the types of roles that they undertook as compared with male employees.
- Understanding about health and disease was changing at the time, but very slowly and without the big 'leaps' in progress that we might have expected based on the scientific developments of the time. Work was a dangerous thing for many people, in terms of both accidents and also contagious diseases. Some workplaces did have systems to manage this, and employee health was already seen as something that should be measured and improved, and the systems in many ways were early versions of those that still exist today.
- The evidence made available through the Data Mapper shows us that historical knowledge is always tentative; what we know about a period of time can change depending on the questions that we ask and the ways in which we go about investigating them.

Key framing questions

1. Why is work an important topic to look at in history?
    a. What different types of jobs are there?
    b. How has work changed over time?

2. What can we learn from X individual (local enquiry)?
    a. How typical was he/she? (In terms of jobs, longevity, reasons for retirement.)
    b. What would his/her retirement have been like?
    c. How has [your local area] changed over time?

3. What can we learn from female Post Office workers in Wales?
    a. How did jobs for men and women differ?
    b. How much did women earn? What influenced this?
    c. Why did women retire? To what extent are these different reasons from men?

4. What can we learn about the risks and rewards of work in industrialised Wales?
    a. Why were workplace protections needed?
    b. What protections were in place during Victorian times?
    c. How do modern health and safety laws differ?

5. What is significant about the Post Office?
    a. Why are some types of work or industry better studied than others?
    b. How can we find out about the past?
    c. What types of questions do historians have about this period of history now?

Key learning intentions

Substantive

1. Students to learn about how life in Victorian Wales differed from today, including in terms of work and longevity, transport, leisure, communication and society.
2. Students to learn about their local history and compare the physical spaces of their locality today with the period of study.
3. Students to learn about the variety of industries and jobs available during the Victorian period, within Wales specifically.
4. Students to learn about the growing service industry and the specific roles available within it, and how these differed by rural and urban locations and by popularity during the period, influenced by new technologies.
5. Students to learn about the role that the Post Office played in connecting communities, especially after the introduction of the Penny Post. It made possible the birthday card!
6. Students to learn about the importance of the Post Office as part of people's financial lives, in terms of savings and pensions, and how this reflected dominant views at the time around self-sufficiency and the deserving or undeserving poor.
7. Students to learn that systems around occupational health existed in Victorian workplaces, and that mental health was already being considered alongside physical health.
8. Students to learn about the move towards regulation of health and safety, and the context of accidents and workplace-acquired illnesses that drove it.
9. Students to examine the role of women in the workplace, including the job roles that they typically held, length of service and reasons for retirement.

Disciplinary

1. Students to examine the fluidity and subjective nature of historical significance. By looking at an area of industrial life largely overlooked (service) and at the lives of 'ordinary' people, rather than those in positions of power, we can examine the silences that live alongside more prominent narratives of Victorian Wales.
2. Students to chart continuity and change in the areas that we examine: work, retirement, healthcare, society, rural and urban environments, technology, the role of women and industry.
3. Students to examine and probe the way in which history is 'done', through a focus on the Zooniverse, community-collected data and the work of historians in creating the Data Mapper, as well as the ways in which this evidence can be used by both academic and 'hobby' historians.

Four purposes for learners

Purpose	Ways the scheme addresses the purpose
Ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives	This is an enquiry-based project, with students self-directing research and gaining satisfaction from making discoveries relevant to them and their *Cynefin* and placing these within a historical context
Enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work	Students use novel digital technology to undertake their enquiry and design their own methodology. The project culminates in a creative and artistic piece of work that demonstrates their understanding of the historical significance of their topic of study.
Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world	Students explore the experiences of diverse members of society, including the different working lives of men and women as well as those with disability or ill health. Students explore workplace protections and the role of occupation and public health.
Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society	Students develop oracy skills through a planned progression framework accompanying the project, helping them to develop as healthy and confident communicators.

‘What matters’ statements for the humanities

WM1: Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future

The learners’ journey through this area will encourage enquiry and discovery, as they are challenged to be curious and to question, to think critically and to reflect upon evidence.

Appropriate disciplinary approaches, including *digital humanities,* will help learners to gather, justify, present, analyse and evaluate a range of evidence. Interpreting and synthesising information will help learners to build upon what they have already learned and further inform their understanding of the world.

WM3: Our natural world is diverse and dynamic, influenced by processes and human actions

Nurturing curiosity can help learners to understand and appreciate how and why places, landscapes and environments in their locality and elsewhere in Wales, as well as in the wider world, are changing. This in turn will enable learners to identify what makes places and spaces distinct, and to develop an awareness of the interconnections between humans and their environment in both contemporary and historical contexts, including in respect of the climate and nature emergency.

This aspect of the area encourages learners to explore concepts, including the interrelationships between humans and the natural world, cause and effect, change and continuity, significance, place, space and physical processes.

WM4: Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs

An appreciation of identity, heritage and *Cynefin*, including the history of Wales and the world, can influence learners emotionally and spiritually, and help to build their sense of self and of belonging. Through an understanding of themselves, learners develop their own identity and an awareness of how they, as individuals, can shape the communities in which they live.

Through consistent exposure to the story of their locality and the story of Wales, as well as to the story of the wider world, learners can develop an understanding of the complex, *pluralistic* and diverse nature of societies, past and present.

This aspect of the area encourages learners to explore concepts, including chronology, change and continuity, diversity, cause and effect, interconnectedness, community, identity and belonging, authority and *governance*.

Descriptions of learning: Humanities

	Progression step 3	Progression step 4
WM1 **Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future**	I can use my experiences, knowledge and beliefs to generate ideas and frame enquiries. I have actively engaged with a range of stimuli, and had opportunities to participate in enquiries, both collaboratively and independently. I can use appropriate methods to gather information related to my enquiries and I am able to interpret the information obtained in the context of the enquiry question. I can reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches I have taken to my enquiries. I can present my findings in a variety of ways, drawing conclusions and making judgements based on the evidence used.	I can use my experiences, knowledge and beliefs to generate ideas independently and frame enquiries, using a range of research approaches when required. I can analyse, present and reflect on my findings, describing patterns and explaining relationships across data and sources. I can reflect on the approaches I have taken to enquiries and identify areas of improvement for future enquires. I can draw considered and reasoned conclusions to my enquiries, while understanding that other people may form different conclusions from the available evidence.
WM3 **Our natural world is diverse and dynamic, influenced by processes and human actions**	I can describe and give simple explanations on how and why some places, spaces, environments and landscapes are especially important to different people and for different reasons.	I can understand and explain how significant places, spaces environments and landforms in the natural world are associated with economic, historical, political, and religious and non-religious beliefs and practices.
WM4 **Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs**	I have an understanding that the past can be divided into periods of time. I also have an understanding that these periods have distinctive features and are different from one another, as well as different from the present. I can describe and explain similarities and differences between people's lives both in the past and present.	I can make meaningful connections and comparisons between a broad range of historical periods of time in order to develop a chronological map of the past. I can use my knowledge and understanding to analyse and explain how different communities and societies have changed over time, in my

	I can describe how some different characteristics of communities and societies have changed, within and across periods of time, in my locality and in Wales, as well as in the wider world. I can describe and explain the ways in which my life is similar and different to others, and I understand that not everyone shares the same experiences, beliefs and viewpoints. I have an understanding of how *factors* in the past and present have shaped my communities.	locality and in Wales, as well as in the wider world. I can analyse and explain the diverse stories, beliefs and experiences of people in societies in my locality and in Wales, as well as in the wider world. I can explain and compare how communities have been shaped by the past and I can explain how a range of factors contribute to this.

Descriptions of learning: Cross-curricular skills

Skills focus	Progression step 3	Progression step 4
Literacy (purpose, collaborative talk and questioning)	I can contribute to group discussion in different roles, taking responsibility for completing the task well. I can ask and answer questions, building on and developing the ideas of others in group discussions. I can respond to others' points of view by seeking clarity, summarising and explaining what I have heard, read or seen. I can organise talk so that different audiences in different contexts can follow what is being said, including using formal language.	I can undertake a range of responsibilities to structure and develop group talk, including in more formal situations. I can sustain a convincing point of view, anticipating and responding to other perspectives. I can respond to others' points of view with confidence and sensitivity, summarising and evaluating what I have heard, read or seen. I can organise talk effectively to respond to how listeners are reacting by adapting what I say and how I say it.
Numeracy (strategic competence)	I can identify, measure or obtain required information to complete the task. I can identify what further information might be required and select what information is most appropriate. I can select, trial and evaluate a variety of possible approaches and break problems into a series of tasks.	I can select, trial and evaluate a variety of possible approaches and break complex problems into a series of tasks.
Numeracy (relationships within the number system and calculation)	I can use understanding of simple fraction, decimal and percentage equivalences, e.g. find 25% of 60cm and know that this is equivalent to ¼ of 60cm. I can calculate a percentage, fraction and decimal of any quantity with a calculator where appropriate.	I can use equivalence of fractions, decimals and percentages to select the most appropriate one for a calculation. I can use efficient methods for multiplication and division of whole numbers and decimals, including decimals such as 0.6 or 0.06.
Numeracy (collecting and interpreting data)	I can collect relevant data to answer posed questions. I can extract and interpret information from an increasing	I can plan how to collect data to test a simple hypothesis. I can interpret graphs that describe real-life situations, including those

	range of diagrams, timetables and graphs (including pie charts). I can draw conclusions from data and recognise that some conclusions may be misleading or uncertain.	used in the media, recognising that some graphs may be misleading. I can interpret mathematical information, drawing inferences from graphs, diagrams and data, including discussion on limitations of data. I can examine results critically, and select and justify choice of statistics, recognising the limitations of any assumptions and their effect on the conclusions drawn.
Digital (data and information literacy)	I can construct, refine and interrogate data sets within tables, charts, spreadsheets and databases to test or support an investigation.	I can create a data capture form, capture data, search data and create a database and spreadsheet with appropriate data input method. I can perform analysis on simple data sets including grouping data as appropriate.
Digital (sourcing, searching and planning digital content)	I can independently create and plan work before beginning a digital task. I can adjust keywords and search techniques to find relevant information.	I can search a variety of sources using relevant search techniques with increased complexity.

Oracy progression template

This scheme of learning offers discrete opportunities for students to make progress in their oracy skills. The oracy skills/tactics suggested here are based on those within the Voice 21 programme to which your school may have access. If not, the skills and scaffolds may need adjusting based on the resources available within your setting.

Activity/ slide no.	**History objective**	**Oracy grouping**	**Oracy activity**	**Oracy skills /tactics**	**Scaffolds**	**Oracy outcome**
Introductory lesson – scene setting	Understand the range of jobs	Nest – what's your dream job? Why? Think of a sentence Paired discussion Group discussion in fours (three discussing, one summarising)	Say their sentence to partner A asks B what their dream job would be, B answers and then swap Read the cards Does this appeal to you and why? Agree which is the most popular and why Summarise – feed back the conclusion of the group Class discussion	Show proof of listening Give reasons for their answers Manage interactions Summarising Give reasons, build and challenge	Stem – my dream job would be… because… Job cards with info on back Sentence stems Which was most popular?	Written answer to the question in books: my dream job would be and why

Women of Wales	Understand how historical context affects women's work	Groups of six – feed in facts discussion	Answer the question: How was work different for women in Victorian Britain? Agree answer in x words Feed in facts and they amend their answer (list of suggested resources on the PPT slide) Reach consensus as a group on hypothesis to be tested	Give reasons to support views Critically examine ideas Choice of content Summarise Working with others and building on others' views Appropriate vocabulary Instigate, build and challenge	Feed in facts Vocabulary scaffold (If school has access to Voice 21 resources) Talk tactics mats and sentence stems (instigate, build and challenge)	Hypothesis to test, created in groups
How typical was the woman you researched?	Understand the 'bigger picture' of women's employment in the Post Office and the relationship between one story and a wider narrative	Group of six, as previous discussion	Agree how to present the key information learned Use PowerPoint or other software to support a verbal presentation	Choice of content Structure and organisation of talk Confidence Voice and body language Audience awareness	Talk detectives Listening ladder	Presentation of findings Peer assessment and self-reflection