

# VICTORIAN BRITAIN

## A Divided Nation?

Were men and women equal in Victorian Britain?



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**Source 1:**  
**Ragged school**

Most of the visitors to the Great Exhibition came on days when the tickets cost a shilling, or five pence. About 4,500,000 people came on these 'shilling days'. These were working people, who came from all over Britain. The first 'shilling day' was expected to lead to a great deal of trouble. One MP, Colonel Sibthorpe warned that there would be crime and disorder.

So on the first 'shilling day' there was a heavy police presence. But nothing happened. In the five and a half months that the Great Exhibition was open, only seven people were arrested and there was hardly any vandalism.

The men who policed the Great Exhibition were members of the Metropolitan Police force.

This force had been established in 1829 and its police constables were given the nickname 'Peelers' after Sir Robert Peel who was Home Secretary at the time. Until the 1820s the main emphasis in law and order was on punishment, because there were few police forces.

There were 400 offences that carried the death penalty, including picking someone's pocket of anything worth one shilling (5p) or more and stealing anything worth £2.00. Sir Robert Peel abolished almost all of the capital offences (those that carried the death penalty) and also began to reform prisons, as well as setting up the Metropolitan Police Force.



**Source 2:**  
**Report on**  
**working women**

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### Source 3: Report on women in mines

Peel wanted to put the emphasis upon preventing crime, rather than punishing criminals. Some of the novels of Charles Dickens, who was writing in the 1830s and 1840s, show how lawless the streets of British cities could be.

In 'Oliver Twist' Fagin runs a gang of pickpockets, and Bill Sykes is a violent and dangerous criminal. In 'Great Expectations', Pip is befriended by the convict Magwitch, who had escaped from a hulk.



### Source 4: Report on children in mines

At first the Police Force was not very popular. People were very concerned that the new police should not be like the military and therefore great care was taken to ensure that police constables did not look like soldiers.

This is why peelers wore top hats instead of helmets and carried truncheons instead of rifles, although cutlasses were available for emergencies!

The success of the Metropolitan Police Force, however, led other parts of the country to set up their own forces. However, it did not become compulsory for counties and boroughs to have police forces until 1856. The duties of the police were extended as more and more laws were passed.



### Source 5: Workhouse, 1851

For example the 1872 Licensing Act made them responsible for supervising public drinking places. Policing was not the only aspect of law and order that changed during the Victorian period.

The ways in which criminals were punished were also changed. 1857 saw the end of Hulk ships. These were anchored ships, which held prisoners who were either awaiting transportation to the colonies, or were used to carry out public works, such as clearing the River Thames.

Class of work	Age	Wages and exp.
General work	18	£12
General work	16	£10
General work	14	£8
General work	12	£6
General work	10	£4
General work	8	£2
General work	6	£1
General work	4	£0
General work	2	£0
General work	0	£0

### Source 6: Servants' wages, 1890s

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Men carry out women frequently paid half as low than half the money  
 made as well as being as poor, but still women whose school  
 requires delivery of work, the result of long training would be  
 thoughtless. women from 11 onwards to 18 of doing a work  
 while the employer would not of a man's worth as best. (Chadwick)

### Source 7: Article on women's work

I am that in a country governed by a woman, where you allow women  
 to have part of the right of the male, prisoners in their own right  
 are made - where you allow a woman who only to hold land, but to be  
 a father in the house and hold legal rights, where a woman by law must  
 be in the household and account of the man. I do not say where she has  
 no right to do with the state and the Church, in what manner, if you  
 come to rights, she has not a right to none.

### Source 9: Disraeli on votes for women

The transportation of criminals gradually declined and the last convict ship arrived in Australia in 1868. These changes led to a new prison building programme based upon the model prison at Pentonville. Inside these new prisons, prisoners were separated, forbidden to communicate with each other and given meaningless work to do. But did these changes make a difference?

	Men	Women
Cotton weavers	15.0	7.0
Wool weavers	20.0	10.0
Spinning	15.0	7.0
Bakers	15.0	7.0
Printers	15.0	7.0
Leather makers	15.0	7.0
Iron cast	15.0	7.0
Steel rollers	15.0	7.0
Building trades	15.0	7.0

### Source 8: Men & women's wages, 1906



## Source 1

## Task

- 1a. What sort of education are the children receiving in this school?
- 1b. List the different skills you can see that are being learnt?
- 1c. What sort of skills do you think a ragged school for girls would teach?



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### Source 1

Ragged schools for girls and boys were set up from 1844 to educate poor children. The president of the Ragged Schools union was Lord Ashley, who later became Lord Shaftesbury. This is a print showing a Ragged School for boys.



(PRO ref: ZPER 34/23, p.520)



## Source 2

## Task

- 2a.** What did Ashley say happened when a woman went to work?
- 2b.** What do you think Ashley believed about the status of men and women?



## Source 2

This is an extract from Lord Ashley's Employment of Women and Children Report 1842. He was criticising the employment of women in coalmines and describing what happened in families where the wife worked.

But now mark the effect of the system on women: it causes a total ignorance of all domestic duties; they know nothing that they ought to know; they are rendered unfit for the duties of women by overwork, and become utterly demoralized. In the male the moral effects of the system are very sad, but in the female they are infinitely worse, not alone upon themselves, but upon their families, upon society, and, I may add, upon the country itself. It is bad enough if you corrupt the man, but if you corrupt the woman, you poison the waters of life at the very fountain. Sir, it appears that they are wholly disqualified from even learning how to discharge the duties of wife and mother.

(PRO ref: ZHC 2/79, p.1335)





## Source 3

## Task

**3a** In what ways does Mr. Wood's statement support Lord Ashley's opinions? See Source **2**

**3b** Why do the mine owners prefer to employ women in the mines according to Mr. Sadler?

**3c** In your opinion, which of these two statements presents the strongest case against women working in the mines?



Witness statements included in Lord Ashley's 1842 report. The first statement is made by Mr. Wood and the second is made by Mr. Sadler.

"I strongly disapprove of females being in pits; the female character is totally destroyed by it; their habits and feelings are altogether different; they can neither discharge the duty of wives nor mothers. I see the greatest difference in the homes of those colliers whose wives do not go into the pits."

"One reason why women are used so frequently in the coal-pits is, that a girl of twenty will work for 2s. a day, or less, and a man of that age would want 3s. 6d. It makes little difference to the coal-master; he pays the same whoever does the work. Some would say he got his coal cheaper, but I am not of that opinion; the only difference is, that the collier can spend 1s. to 1s. 6d. more at the alehouse."

(PRO ref: ZHC 2/79, p.1338)



## Source 4

## Task

**4a.** What work were women doing in the coal mines?

**4b.** What was being criticised in the report?

**Think about the evidence in sources 2, 3 and 4.**

**4c.** Summarise the concerns that the report raises about women and girls working in the mines.

**4d.** Do you think that banning women from working in the mines was good or bad for their status?

## Source 4

**This extract comes from the same report on mines published by Lord Ashley in 1842.**



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In the West Riding, it appears, girls are almost universally employed as trappers and hurriers, in common with boys. The girls are of all ages, from seven to twenty-one. They commonly work quite naked down to the waist, and are dressed—as far as they are dressed at all—in a loose pair of trowsers. These are seldom whole on either sex. In many of the collieries the adult colliers, whom these girls serve, work perfectly naked. Near Huddersfield, the sub-commissioner examined a female child. He says,

“I could not have believed that I should have found human nature so degraded. Mr. Holroyd, and Mr. Brook, a surgeon, confessed, that although living within a few miles, they could not have believed that such a system of unchristian cruelty could have existed.”

Speaking of one of the girls, he says

“She stood shivering before me from cold. The rug that hung about her waist was as black as coal, and saturated with water, the drippings of the roof.” “In a pit near New Mills,” (says the sub-commissioner) “the chain passing high up between the legs of two girls, had worn large holes in their trowsers. Any sight more disgustingly indecent or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work. No brothel can beat it.”

Sir, it would be impossible to enlarge upon all these points; the evidence is

(PRO ref: ZHC 2/79, p.1327)





## Source 5

## Task

**5a** Write down a list of the different sorts of occupations that are given for the men in the workhouse.

**5b** Write down a list of the different sorts of occupations that are given for the women in the workhouse. (hint – check the ages- ignore young persons who are listed as scholars)

**5c** Which list is the longer?

**5d** What is the most common form of work done by the women? What does this tell you about employment of men and women in the middle of the nineteenth century?

**This is the 1851 census return for a workhouse. It lists all the people who were in the workhouse on the night of 30th March 1851. On the first page are the names of the Master and the Matron and the other officials who ran the workhouse, but after that are the names of all the paupers.**

<http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/victorianbritain/divided/source5.htm>

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**(PRO ref: HO 107/1599/1)**



## Source 6

## Task

- 6a. What sort of work is included in this table?
- 6b. How much did a 'between maid' earn a week?
- 6c. What does the number of different job descriptions tell you about the importance of this kind of work?
- 6d. In the 1901 census, more than 2,000,000 women were listed as working in these sort of jobs. Why do you think so many women did this work when the pay was so low?
- 6e 50 years earlier in the 1851 census almost exactly 1,000,000 women were working as servants. Why do you think the number of female servants had risen so much by 1901?
- 6f Do you think that this is evidence that women had more opportunities by 1901?

## Source 6

**Average wages of female domestic servants according to class of work. Figures collected by the Board of Trade in the 1890's based on actual returns from 2,000 households.**





Class of work	Age	Average annual wage
Between maid	19	£10.7
Scullery maid	19	£13
Kitchen maid	20	£15
Nurse-housemaid	21-25	£16
General domestic	21-25	£14.6
Housemaid	21-25	£16.2
Nurse	25-30	£20.1
Parlour maid	25-30	£20.6
Laundry maid	25-30	£23.6
Cook	25-30	£20.2
Lady's maid	30-35	£24.7
Cook-housekeeper	40	35.6
Housekeeper	40	£52.5



## Source 7

## Task

- 7a** How much were women paid in 1874 compared to men?
- 7b** What was the highest pay that a skilled woman worker could get?
- 7c** Why do you think Emma Paterson wrote this article?





## Source 7

This is part of an article written by Emma Paterson, the leader of the Women's Trade Union in 1874.

'Not only are women frequently paid half or less than half for doing work as well and as quickly as men, but skilled women whose labour requires delicacy of touch, the result of long training as well as thoughtfulness, receive from 11 shillings to 16 or 17 shillings a week, while the roughest unskilled labour of a man is worth at least 18 shillings.'



## Source 8

## Task

**8a** Look at this source and then think back to the census return - **source 5**. Do you think that women have more work opportunities by the beginning of the 20th century?

**8b** Do these wage figures tell you anything about the importance of women workers in Britain by the beginning of the 20th century?

**8c** Using your knowledge of history, what major event from 1914-18 will change the status of women workers in Britain and why?



## Source 8

This is a table showing the daily wages of men and women in 1906. It comes from a report published by the Board of Trade.

	Men	Women
Cotton workers	£1.47	93p
Shoe makers	£1.43	65p
Shipbuilders	£1.79	73p
Bakers	£1.45	63p
Printers	£1.84	61p
Leather tanners	£1.45	65p
Iron and Steel Workers	£1.95	—
Building workers	£1.65	—



## Source 9

## Task

**9a** Why did Benjamin Disraeli believe that women should have the vote?

**9b** Why do you think he made this speech?





## Source 9

**This is part of speech made by Benjamin Disraeli, the leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons in April 1866. He was speaking during a debate on the Second Reform Bill.**

I say that in a country governed by a woman - where you allow women to form part of the other estate of the realm - peeresses in their own right for example - where you allow a woman not only to hold land, but to be a lady of the manor and hold legal courts - where a woman by law may be a churchwarden and overseer of the poor - I do not see, when she has so much to do with the state and the Church, on what reasons, if you come to right, she has not a right to vote.