

Y5 History: How did Britain strengthen its Empire during the Victorian era?

Prior Learning

- Historians use primary and secondary sources to find out about life in the past.
- Progress of technology supported some countries in becoming more powerful than others.
- Christopher Columbus and other European explorers began a period of exploration and conquest in the 15th century, where new lands were colonised, and their resources taken back to Europe.
- An empire is a group of countries or territories ruled by one leader or one country's government, sometimes controlled by force.

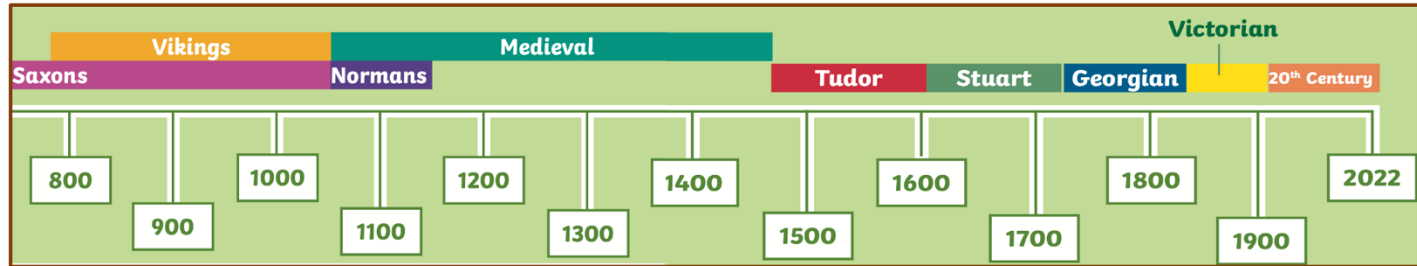


Queen Victoria reigned over Britain from **1837 to 1901**. During this time, there were major changes to all aspects of British society, due to exciting discoveries and inventions; The gap between the everyday lives of the rich and poor continued to widen – particularly in the new and rapidly expanding towns and cities.

Key Dates

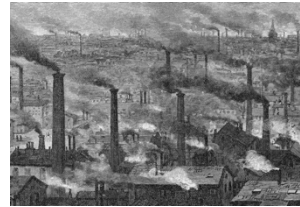
1842	Children under 10 no longer allowed to work in mines
1844	Children aged 8-13 can only work 6.5 hours per day
1856	Each county must have its own police force
1861	21 years after marrying Victoria, Albert died of typhoid
1864	Children under 10 no longer allowed to sweep chimneys
1875	Public Health Act makes councils responsible for providing clean water, proper drainage and a medical officer
1880	School is made compulsory for children between the age of 5 and 10, to help improve the lives of the poor.

British History Timeline



Industrial Revolution

1750 and 1900 was a period of huge change in Britain. Before this, Britain was a rural, agricultural nation: most people lived in the countryside, and made a living by farming the land and producing goods at home, all by hand (no large machinery). However, people began to realise that steam produced by burning coal could be used to power large machines in factories and mills, making goods from metals, cotton and wool. This reduced the time it took to make something and increased the amount that could be made, making the products cheaper.



Huge factories were built and towns expanded. Better transport links – such as from the quickly expanding railway network – helped boost trade by transporting people and goods quickly and cheaply all across the country. Everyday goods made at home could no longer compete, so many people moved to towns, attracted by reliable work and pay from the factories.

Houses for workers sprang up near to the factories, built very closely together (known as slums). Poor sanitation and tightly packed houses led to disease – the standard of living was very low. Workers were cheap and plentiful – families who could not afford the rent would be sent to the workhouse.



Conditions in the factory and coal mines were harsh: long hours for little pay, and a high risk of injury or death from working closely with the machines and in dangerous conditions. Children as young as four would be used as very cheap labour. Throughout Victoria's reign, many social reform and public health acts improved the living and working conditions for families, but poverty – and the threat of being sent to the workhouse – continued long after the Victorian era ended.



What were the consequences of the Empire, on Britain and the countries under its rule?

By the end of Queen Victoria's reign (1901), the British Empire ruled a quarter of the world's territories and population. But why did Britain want an empire?

- Setting up colonies overseas meant that other countries couldn't take the land and become more powerful than Britain: more land = more power.
- To fuel the Industrial Revolution and secure trading routes; the empire gave access to cheap, raw materials and labour, and a worldwide market in which to sell the finished products back to the colonies. Britain became one of the richest nations in the world.
- To spread Christianity and western culture – it was a widely held belief in Europe that native populations needed to be 'civilised' by the colonialists.

Canada

- Natural resources, including animal fur, timber; iron and copper
- It's position in the North Atlantic made it useful for trading and shipping, now that the US had become independent.
- England was becoming overcrowded, and there was lots of space for new British settlements.

Caribbean Islands (West Indies)

- Huge plantations of sugar, cotton, cocoa, coffee and tobacco were farmed here, originally worked by slaves that had been bought in Africa and transported across the Atlantic.
- Although Britain banned the slave trade across its Empire in 1833, much of the work on these plantations continued to be done by free men and women, who were paid poorly.

Key Vocabulary

Queen Victoria, reign, Industrial Revolution, railways, factories, poverty, slums, sanitation, workhouse, social reform, public health, invention, trade, import, export, natural resources, manufacture, British Empire, territory, colony, slavery, independence, consequence, interpretation

Australia

- Natural resources, including precious gems, gold and iron.
- It was originally designated as a penal colony, to help relieve overcrowded prisons in the UK: prisons were built and criminals were packed off on the long voyage
- They often decided to stay once they were released, and a new settlement began.
- By the mid 19th century, half a million colonialist chose to move there from the UK.
- The Aborigines were harshly treated by settlers: the native population declined by 80% following colonisation.

India

- Natural resources, including precious gems, silk, spices and tea (a crop introduced from China by the British, so that they had control over the popular drink).
- The East India Company controlled the export of the country's resources at great profit; they employed armed soldiers from India to stop rebellions against unfair treatment.
- India was taken over by the British government in 1858; Victoria became the 'Empress of India', and it was known as the 'Jewel in the Crown' of the British Empire.

Southern Africa

Africa was rich in natural resources, and the Victorian Era saw the 'Scramble for Africa' – seven European countries raced for control over territories. The UK had dominance in the south, rich in diamonds and gold.

