

The National Archives
Education Service

Victorian Homes

Was there much
difference between
rich and poor homes?

Introduction

Lesson at a Glance

Suitable For: KS1-3

Time Period:

Victorians 1850-1901

Curriculum Link:

KS1: Changes within living memory – aspects of change in national life

KS2: British history beyond 1066 – changes in an aspect of social history

Learning Objective:

To investigate the lifestyle of the Victorians

To examine the class system of the Victorian period

Resources needed:

Printed sources

Victorian London

In Victorian society, rich and poor could find themselves living very close together, sometimes just streets apart. During the 19th century more people moved into the towns and cities to find work in factories. Cities filled to overflowing and London was particularly bad. At the start of the 19th century about 20% of Britain's population lived there, but by 1851 half the population of the country had set up home in London.

London, like most cities, was not prepared for this great increase in people. People crowded into already crammed houses. Rooms were rented to whole families or perhaps several families. If there were no rooms to rent, people stayed in lodging houses.

But how different were the homes they lived in? Use this collection of sources to find out.

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Background

Land-owners or factory owners often built houses for their workers. Unfortunately, this did not reduce overcrowding or improve building standards." The houses were cheap, most had between 2-4 rooms - one or two rooms downstairs, and one or two rooms upstairs. But Victorian families were big with perhaps 4-5 children. There was no water, and no toilet. A whole street (sometimes more) would have to share a couple of toilets and a pump. The water from the pump was frequently polluted. It was no surprise that few children made it to adulthood.

Some of the worst houses were 'back to backs' or courts. The only windows were at the front. There were no backyards and a sewer ran down the middle of the street. Housing conditions like this were perfect breeding grounds for disease.

On the other hand, the homes for the middle classes and the upper classes were much better. They were better built, larger and had most of the new gadgets installed, such as flushing toilets, gas lighting, and inside bathrooms. These houses were also decorated in the latest styles. There would be heavy curtains, flowery wallpaper, carpets and rugs, ornaments, well made furniture, paintings and plants. The source picture at the top this webpage illustrates some of the typical furnishings for the homes of the wealthier classes.

Most rich people had servants and they would live in the same house, frequently sleeping on the top floor or the attic. The rich had water pumps in their kitchens or sculleries and their waste was taken away down into underground sewers.

Gradually, improvements for the poor were made. In 1848, Parliament passed laws that allowed city councils to clean up the streets. One of the first cities to become a healthier place was Birmingham. Proper sewers and drains were built. Land owners had to build houses to a set standard. Streets were paved and lighting was put up.

Over time slums were knocked down and new houses built. However, these changes did not take place overnight. When slums were knocked down in 1875 the poor people had little choice but to move to another slum, making that one worse. Few could not afford new housing.

Teacher's notes

In this lesson on Victorian homes students are gradually introduced to sources on Hackney, starting with a small map section, then photographic evidence, concluding with the census.

Teachers may wish to ease their pupils gently into working with the census returns. They can be asked to look first at column headings, then down the columns. The list of occupants is also worth discussion, as are terms such as 'Nursing' which have changed their meanings - to wet nursing in this case.

Although the tasks do not directly ask pupils to make comparisons, it is likely that they will do so anyway. The largest differences are between the photos.

The activity presented here can be extended with illustrations of the interiors of rich and poor housing.

Sources

Illustration : COPY 1/155 f.198

Source 1 : IR 121/17/17

Source 2 : P8629 (Image courtesy of London Borough of Hackney Archives)

Source 3 : RG 12/284

Source 4 : P76 (Image courtesy of London Borough of Hackney Archives)

Source 5 : RG 12/200

Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. This is a map of Hackney from 1910.
 - a) What things does it show?
 - b) Are all the streets the same width?
 - c) What work places are shown?
 - d) Are there any parks or open fields, schools or churches?
 - e) Can you find Conduit Street off Rossington Street?

Look at Source 2

2. This is a photograph of Caroline Cottages, Conduit Place, taken around the 1890's.
 - a) Are these homes for the rich or the poor?
 - b) How many families lived in Conduit Place (at least)? (Handy Hint: count the front doors.)
 - c) How many rooms do you think each home had?
 - d) What would go on in each room?
 - e) Where would the children play?
 - f) There is only one young person in this photo. Does that mean that:
 - no children lived here except him?
 - the people that lived here were comfortably off because they could afford to send their children to school?
 - school was compulsory in the 1890s, so the children would be in school?
 - g) Can you see what the woman at the end of the street is carrying?

Look at Source 3

3. This is the 1891 Census Return for Conduit Place
 - a) What type of work did the head of the household do?
 - b) Did the children go out to work?
 - c) Did the wives go out to work?
 - d) Who other than the Harding family lived at 5 Conduit Place?
 - e) What else do you notice about the Harding family?
 - f) Why do you think they had a lodger living with them?
 - g) Conduit Place does not exist today. Make a list of reasons why it might have been demolished.

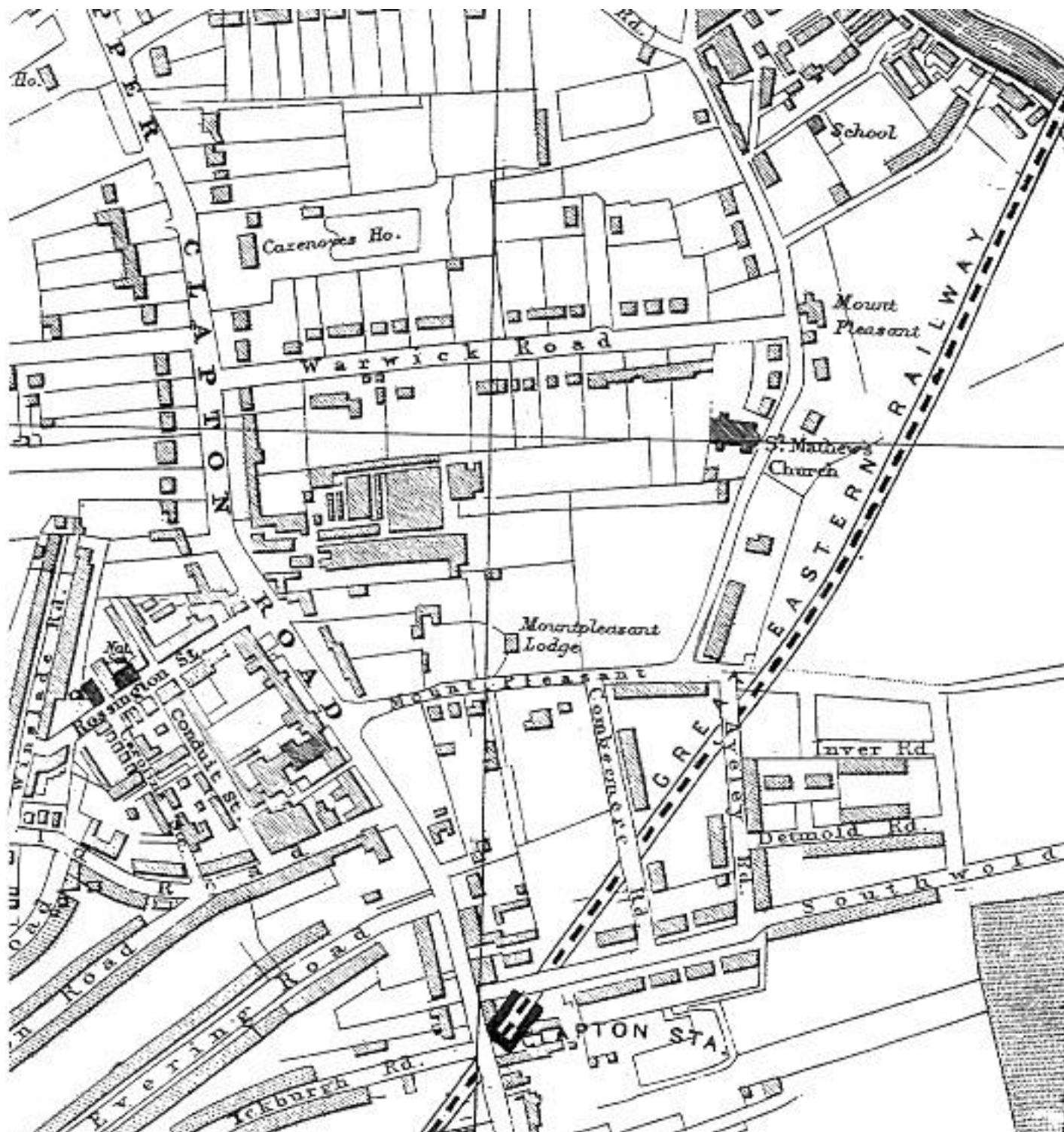
Look at Source 4

4. Now let's look at a photograph of Eagle House, just down the road from Conduit Street.
 - a) Did this house belong to a rich or poor family?
 - b) How many families do you think lived here?
 - c) How many floors does the house appear to have?
 - d) How many rooms do you think the house might have?
 - e) What tells you that this photo was posed?

Look at Source 5

5. This is the Census return for Eagle House.
 - a) What does George Glover do for a living?
 - b) How many children does he have?
 - c) Is this family middle class or working class?
6. Create a list of: similarities between the rich and poor families: differences between the rich and poor families.
7. If your house is over 100 years contact your local archive to find the census records and see who lived there, or alternatively, you can look at the census records online.

Source One: Map of Hackney 1910 (IR 121/17/17)



Source Two: Photograph of Conduit Place 1890s (P8691)



Source Three: Census Return for Conduit Place 1891 (RG 12/284)

Administration County of <i>Leicestershire</i>		Municipal Borough of <i>Leicester</i>		Municipal Ward of <i>Stoney Hill</i>		The undermentioned Houses are situated within the Boundaries of the Towns or Villages or Hamlets of <i>Leicester</i>				Parliamentary Borough or Division of <i>Leicester</i>		Ecclesiastical Parish or District of <i>St. Michael</i>		Page 40
No. of HOUSES	No. of ROADS, STREETS, ALLEYS, or PATHS	NAMES AND SURNAME of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Yearly Income	Value of Property	Value of Possessions	Value of Stock	Value of Debt	Value of other Property	Value of other Possessions	(1) Read (2) Blind (3) Lame (4) Deaf (5) Dumb (6) Insane (7) Inebriate (8) Idiote
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	1	<i>Mrs Mary Ann Conroy</i>	Head	<i>Wid.</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>Calverley & Company</i>					<i>£120</i>			
1	1	<i>Robert</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>31</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Philip</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>28</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Charles</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>25</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>George Mill</i>	Daughter	<i>Single</i>	<i>22</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Henry Thomas</i>	Son	<i>Mar.</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>General Labourer</i>					<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Ann</i>	Wife	<i>Mar.</i>	<i>15</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Edith</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>12</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>John</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>10</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Edmond</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>8</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Alfred</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>7</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Levante</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>5</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Henry</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>3</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>William Mills</i>	Son	<i>Mar.</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>General Labourer</i>					<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Ann</i>	Wife	<i>Mar.</i>	<i>22</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>James James</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>20</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>William</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>18</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Elizabeth</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>15</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Elizabeth</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>13</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Henry</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>11</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Thomas</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>9</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>William</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>7</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>John</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>5</i>						<i>£10</i>			
1	1	<i>Frederick</i>	Son	<i>Single</i>	<i>3</i>						<i>£10</i>			
5	5										<i>£50</i>			

NOTE.—Draw the pen through such of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Source Three – Transcript Census Return for Conduit Place 1891 (RG 12/284)

Administrative County of		London	The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the										Page 40		
Civil Parish of Hackney		Municipal Borough of _____		Municipal Ward of Stamford Hill		Urban Sanitary District of _____		Town or Village or Hamlet of _____		Rural Sanitary District of _____		Parliamentary Borough or Division of Hackney North		Ecclesiastical Parish or District of St Michael	
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c, and No or NAME of HOUSE	Houses		Number of rooms occupied if less than five	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CONDITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of		PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employer	Employed	Neither Employed nor Employer	WHERE BORN	If (1) Deaf - and - Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic, Imbecille or Idiot
		Inhabited	Uninhabited (U) or Building (B)					Male	Female						
259	5 Conduit Place Rossington Street	1			Mary Anne Harding	Head	Wid[ow]		29	Charing / Nursing			x	Essex, Romford	
	" "				Robert "	Son	S	7		Scholar				London, Stoke Newington	
	" "				Phillip "	Son		6		"				" "	
	" "				Amelia "	Dau[ghte]r			2					London, Clapton	
	" "				George Nibb	Lodger	S	21		Window Cleaner			x	" "	
260	6 Conduit Place Rossington Street	1			Henry Turner	Head	M	36		General Labourer		x		" "	
	" "				Annie "	Wife	M		33					Essex, Ashton	
	" "				Ada "	Dau[ghte]r			12	Scholar				" "	
	" "				Rose "	Dau[ghte]r			11	"				London, Clapton	
	" "				Edmund "	Son		9		"				" "	
	" "				Abigail "	Son			6	"				" "	
	" "				Francis "	Dau[ghte]r			3					" "	
261	" "				Henry "	Son		1 mo						" "	
	7 Conduit Place Rossington Street	1			William Wells	Head	M	41		General Labourer		x		" "	
	" "				Annie "	Wife	M		43					London, Hampstead	
	" "				Annie Louise "	Dau[ghte]r			12	Scholar				" "	
	" "				William "	Son		9		"				" "	
	" "				Elizabeth Maud	Dau[ghte]r			6	"				" "	
	" "				Mary Anne "	Dau[ghte]r			2					" "	
	" "				Martha Alice "	Dau[ghte]r			2 mo					" Clapton	

Source Three – Transcript Census Return for Conduit Place 1891 (RG 12/284) cont.

No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c, and No or NAME of HOUSE	Houses		Number of rooms occupied if less than five	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CONDITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of		PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employer	Employed	Neither Employed nor Employer	WHERE BORN	If (1) Deaf - and - Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic, Imbecille or Idiot	
		Inhabited	Uninhabited (U) or Building (B)					Male	Female							
262	7 1/2 Conduit Place Rossington Street	1			William Hollingworth	Head	M	54		General Labourer				Essex, Halsted		
	" "				Sarah "	Wife	M		53					" "		
	" "				Ernest "	Son	S	20		Miller Carrier		x		London, Clapton		
	" "				Herbert "	Son	S	17		Page Domestic Servant		x		" "		
	" "				Sidney "	Son	S	14		Capel [Horse] Master		x		" "		
	" "				Frederick "	Son	S	7		Scholar				" "		
263	8 Conduit Place Rossington Street	1			James Cooper	Head	M	40		General Labourer		x		London, Upper Clapton		
					Mary "	Wife	M		37					London, Homerton		
					Mary Eliza "	Dau[ghte]r	S		15	Charwoman		x		London, Clapton		
					William "	Son	S	11		Scholar				" "		
					Frederick "	Son	S	8		"				" "		
5	Total of houses and tenaments with less than 5 rooms	5	-	5	Total of Males and Females			17	14							

Source Four – Eagle House, Homerton High Street (P76)



Image courtesy of London Borough of Hackney Archives

Source Five – Census return for Eagle House 1891 (RG 12/200)

Administrative County of <u>London</u>		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the										Page 2			
Civil Parish <u>of Hackney</u>		Municipal Borough <u>of South Hackney</u>		Municipal Ward <u>of Homerton</u>		Urban Sanitary District of _____		Town or Village or Hamlet of _____		Rural Sanitary District of _____		Parliamentary Borough or Division <u>of South Hackney</u>		Ecclesiastical Parish or District <u>St Barnabas Homerton</u>	
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c, and No. or NAME of HOUSE	Houses Inhabited	Uninhabited (U) or Building (B)	Number of rooms occupied if less than five	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of		PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employer	Employed	Neither Employed nor Employer	WHERE BORN	If (1) Deaf - and - Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic, Imbecille or Idiot
14	Eagle House High St.	1			George J Glover	Head	M	47		Dyer & Cleaner	x			London Holloway	
	" "				Annie "	Wife	M		50					Sussex Brighton	
	" "				Percy "	Son	S	16		Clerk		x		London Hackney	
14 (cont)	Eagle House, High Street				Lizzy Sole	Servant	S		26	Domestic Servant General		x		London, Hackney	

Administrative County of		London	The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the										Page 2		
Civil Parish of Hackney		Municipal Borough of South Hackney		Municipal Ward of Homerton		Urban Sanitary District of _____		Town or Village or Hamlet of _____		Rural Sanitary District of _____		Parliamentary Borough or Division of South Hackney		Ecclesiastical Parish or District of St Barnabas, Homerton	
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c, and No or NAME of HOUSE	Houses		Number of rooms occupied if less than five	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of		PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employer	Employed	Neither Employed nor Employer	WHERE BORN	If (1) Deaf - and - Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic, Imbecille or Idiot
		Inhabited	Uninhabited (U) or Building (B)					Male	Female						
14	Eagle House, High Street	1			George J Glover	Head	M	47		Dyer and Cleaner	x			London, Holloway	
	" "				Annie "	Wife	M		50					Sussex, Brighton	
	" "				Percy "	Son	S	16		Clerk		x		London, Hackney	
14 (cont)	Eagle House, High Street				Lizzy Sole	Servant	S		26	Domestic Servant General		x		London, Hackney	