

What were towns like in nineteenth century Britain?

Story

Create a title for each paragraph. (What is it about?)

The article below examines the story behind what towns were like in nineteenth century Britain.

Summarise each paragraph in 1 or 2 bullet points.

Many historians call the nineteenth century a time of 'great changes'. Population grew rapidly and where people lived changed too. After 1851, more people lived in towns than in the countryside, and more people worked in industry than in agriculture. The source of wealth also changed as industry and trade became a quicker route to riches than owning land. Successful businessmen started to buy up old country houses and take their place in running the country. Many argued that their spectacular wealth was made by exploiting their workers, forcing them to work long hours for very low wages.

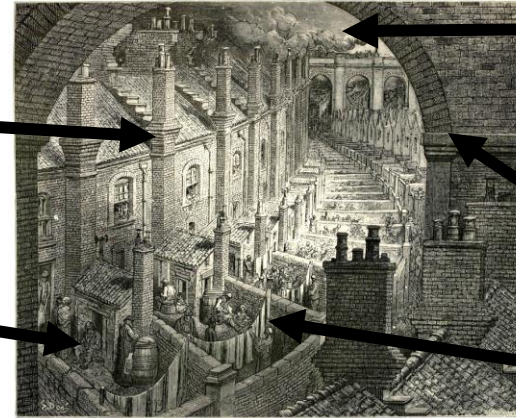
The new towns that grew so rapidly during the century were pretty horrid places in which to live, and, increasingly this led to demands for action to be taken. Conflicting theories emerged. One, promoted by people like Jeremy Bentham and Samuel Smiles said it was not the business of the government to intervene in living conditions or in the relationship between workers and employers. Others, such as Edwin Chadwick, Lord Shaftesbury, Octavia Hill and Elizabeth Fry, argued that the state had a duty to interfere and to put right the wrongs of society. This was an argument that reverberated around society for most of the century, and is still relevant today.

Much of the infrastructure of society changed. Technology brought the 'Penny Post' (the first postal system) the telegraph; cheap transport using the new railways, and, towards the end of the century, popular newspapers like the Daily Mail. It was now possible to travel quickly and cheaply and for the first time find out what was happening in London and other parts of the country within 24 hours. News travelled fast!

Source

A

This illustration entitled 'Over London – by rail'. This was created by Gustave Dore in 1872 and shows a bird's eye view of London's slums.



Houses were built 'back to back' which created overcrowded, cramped living conditions

Many people can be seen in the gardens as house sharing was commonplace

The fumes of the newly built railways engulf the tops of the houses. They did offer a chance for cheap, fast travel

Large, imposing railway viaducts were built over slums and seem dominate the neighbourhood

Tiny shared washhouses and privies were the only way to keep clean

B

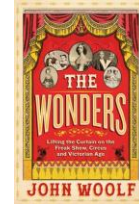
From a report by Neil Arnott and James Kay, (1838) "In Glasgow, which I visited first, I was found that the great mass of fever cases occurred in the dirty narrow streets and courts. This was where the poorest were found, because these were the cheapest lodgings."

Scholarship



Historian Hallie Rubenhold writing in her book "The Five" in 2019

"While the wealthy enjoyed the fine weather from beneath their parasols and from under the trees of their suburban villas, the homeless and poor made use of it by creating an open-air encampment in Trafalgar Square...With no money for lodgings, they slept rough in the nearby square, where they were joined by an increasing population of unemployed and homeless workers who would rather turn to the street than face the deplorable and demeaning conditions in the workhouse".



Historian Dr John Woolf writing in his book "The Wonders" in 2019

"Barnum had rented a house in Grafton Street, Mayfair, a stone's throw from respectable Piccadilly...It was the perfect location to solicit a respectable following and project an image of wealth. The West End was home to court and government, where the wealthy, leisured classes promenaded down clean, wide-open streets and propriety was in abundance: it was an angelic side to monstrous London."

Task 1

Read through the **Story** of what towns in nineteenth century Britain were like. For each paragraph, you need to create a 'title' on one side, and a short summary (two bullet points maximum) on the other.

Task 2

Look at **sources** A and B. In your book, write a short description of the message of each source. Then answer the question "What do these sources tell you about what towns were like in the nineteenth century?"

Task 3

Read through Rubenhold and Woolf's **scholarship** about London in the nineteenth century. Highlight what you think are the three most important sentences. In your book, answer the question "To what extent was London a horrible place to live in the 19th century?"