The Victorian Age

The Great Exhibition

Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 until 1901. She ruled over a vast empire of 63 countries, which covered one third of the world and included India, Canada, Australia and parts of Africa.

Victoria's reign was a time of progress. In 1851, the Great Exhibition took place in London to show the world how advanced Britain was in technology and industry. The development of the train was particularly important. Thomas Cook realised that they could use trains not only in industry but also for transporting people. He organised the first ever day-trip by train. It was a great success. His trips were cheap and people could now go to the seaside for a day. The nearest seaside towns to London, especially Brighton, became very popular.

Very few **Victorian children** went to school. Boarding schools existed, but rich boys and girls often had tutors at home. Most poor **children worked** [→ p. 117], often from the age of 5. Some sold flowers or fruit on city streets, but many worked in factories. Some children worked as chimney sweeps or in houses as servants.

Life for factory workers was terrible. The machines were very noisy and the workers had to work 12 hours a day for very little money. Small children had to go under machines to clean and repair them. They often lost an arm or a leg in the machinery, or were even killed. They frequently became ill because factories were dark and dusty. Gradually, during the Victorian Age conditions improved. New laws limited the working day and the age of child workers, and made school obligatory.

boarding schools: collegi   **chimney sweeps:** spazzacamini   **dusty:** polverose

Queen Victoria

Boys working in a factory

Literature

Oliver Twist

Oliver Twist, by Charles Dickens, is the story of an orphan in Victorian times. Dickens wanted to show readers what life was like for poor people. Oliver has a terrible life. He lives in a workhouse, an institution for orphans and homeless people.

The children in the workhouse have to work hard and get very little food. They are treated very badly.

More words!

accident: incidente
burn: bruciare
exhausted: esausto
noisy: rumoroso
unsafe: pericoloso