May 1851, Queen Victoria opened the Great Exhibition of the Works of industry of all Nations. A special building had been built in Hyde Park for the exhibition and it had been nick-named the ‘Crystal Palace’. The Crystal Palace was 500 metres long and covered an area of about ten hectares. It was made almost entirely of iron and glass. 4,500 tonnes of iron. And nearly 300,000 panes of glass.

Queen Victoria thought the Great Exhibition was all ‘most wonderful’, but was life in Britain at the time of the Great Exhibition as ‘great’ and ‘wonderful’ as it appeared on the surface?

I. Were men and women equal in Victorian Britain?

In many different ways women were regarded as second class, even though Queen Victoria had been on the throne for fourteen years and few people would have dared to argue with her.

No women could vote, and this would not change until 1918. There were no important female political figures, apart from the Queen herself and almost all the major reforms during the nineteenth century were carried out by men. Queen Victoria was also a determined opponent of ‘votes for women’, which she described a ‘mad, wicked folly’.
a folly : une sottise  
wicked : malicieux, diabolique, méchant

At work, women had few opportunities. Work in textile factories was one of the few that women had, the other main one was domestic service, which became even more important in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Middle class women usually did not work. Their role in the family was to supervise the household and support their husbands. The great majority of women seem to have accepted this role.

But, despite all of these disadvantages, there were signs that women were beginning to demand and achieve some forms of equality. Many of the leading novelists of the first half of the nineteenth century were women. In the field of medicine, Florence Nightingale made important breakthroughs. Florence Nightingale became a pioneer in the visual presentation of information and statistical graphics. She used methods such as the pie chart. While taken for granted now, it was at the time a relatively novel method of presenting data.

In the second half of the century women began to demand the vote and the leaders of the suffrage movements were all female. Their most famous leader was Emmeline Pankhurst.

**Timeline**

1839 Women gain rights of custody over their children under the age of seven.
1842-47 Mines and factory Acts protect women workers for the first time.
1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act allows women to sue their husbands for divorce for the first time.
1860 Florence Nightingale opens the first training school for nurses.
1869 Single women, if they are ratepayers, can vote in town council elections.
1876 Women can become doctors. Sandon's Act made education became compulsory for all children to age 10, but fees still had to be paid.
1878 London University allows women to take university degrees.
1880 Mundella's Act made education for all children free until the age of ten.
1889 Women are allowed to vote in County Council elections.
II. How safe was working in Victorian Britain?

In the middle of the 18th century, most coalmines in Britain were near the surface and mining was a small scale industry where families worked together. But in the second half of the century surface coal began to run out and mines became deeper.

Deeper mines were much more dangerous. There was not only a much greater risk of rock falls and flooding, but miners could also run into pockets of gas underground that could lead to explosions or suffocation.

Miners had virtually nothing to protect themselves against the increased dangers. Some took canaries underground to warn them against gas, if the canary stopped singing that was a sign that gas was present.

The most serious danger of all was caused by the need for light. At first miners carried candles underground, but this proved to be very dangerous, as pockets of gas could ignite without warning. In all, it was dark, dangerous and deadly work. Throughout the 19th century more than a thousand miners were killed every year in Britain.


No. 309 George Bentley:

Age 8 years, has worked for a year and is paid a shilling a day (5p). He lives in South Normanton and walks a mile and a half to the pit each day. He has his breakfast before he leaves home. He works full time from half past six in the morning to eight at night with an hour for lunch on some days. He sometimes does three quarter days from half past six in the morning until seven at night, and half days from half past six in the morning until three or four in the afternoon with no break for lunch. He does not work at night or on a Sunday. He eats bread and dripping for breakfast, potatoes, and occasionally has bacon, bread, and milk for his supper. He attends the Ranter's Sunday School to learn his alphabet. This boy appears half starved, like the three others I spoke to. I visited their homes and they were the poorest I witnessed.

Source 4. Number of miners killed and injured in accidents from July 1898 to June 1899 and in the previous twelve months.

Number of miners killed:
- in railway service: 505 in 1898, 522 in 1899
- in mines: 806 in 1898, 908 in 1899
- in quarries: 101 in 1898, 135 in 1899
- in factories: 504 in 1898, 660 in 1899
- Miscellaneous: 203 in 1898, 238 in 1899

Non-fatal accidents:
- in railway service: 12,837 in 1898, 13,992 in 1899
- in mines: 4,418 in 1898, 4,582 in 1899
- in quarries: 1,266 in 1898, 1,729 in 1899
- in factories: 38,555 in 1898, 58,628 in 1899
- miscellaneous: 6,676 in 1898, 10,892 in 1899
Timeline

1781 James Watt's rotary steam engine invented, this could be used to lower miners down a shaft or to pump water out of a mine.

1815 Sir Humphrey Davy invented the miners’ safety lamp. This meant that miners did not have to carry naked candles down mines.

1819 Cotton Factory Act, this banned children under the age of nine from working, and limited the hours of children from nine to sixteen to twelve hours a day.

1833 Factory Act, this banned children from working in textile factories under the age of nine. From nine to thirteen they were limited to nine hours a day and 48 hours a week. From thirteen to eighteen they were limited to twelve hours a day and 69 hours a week. All children under eleven were to have two hours education a day.

1842 Publication of the 'First Report of the Children's Employment Commissioners: Mines and Collieries', which had been prepared by Lord Ashley.

1844 Factory Act, this classed women as young persons under the age of eighteen and limited the hours of both groups to twelve on weekdays and nine on Saturdays. Children under the age of thirteen were only to work six hours on Saturday and six and a half hours on weekdays. They were to have three hours education a day.

1850 The Ten Hour Act, this set the working day for all workers at ten and a half hours. Saturday afternoons were to be free.

III. How did the railway change the lives of people in Victorian Britain?

The most popular way of getting to the Great Exhibition was by buying a ticket that included a return rail journey and entry. Hundreds of thousands of people took advantage of these day trips, which were the idea of Thomas Cook.

Thomas Cook started his business in 1841, but the Great Exhibition gave him his big chance. He booked trains from all over Britain to take people to the Great Exhibition and charged them a fixed price for the return trip and the entry ticket. Overnight he had invented the 'Day Out'. As Cook's business grew he began to offer excursions to more and more places, including trips to other European countries. When Thomas Cook's son took over the family business he increased the tours abroad and offered a wider choice of excursions.

At first, railway companies tried to avoid catering for the masses and preferred to run trains that only offered second and first class carriages. They also tried to avoid stopping their
trains at every station. But in 1844 the Railways Act stated that at least one train a day must stop at every station and include third class carriages. Now large numbers of Victorians could afford to travel. Rich people could even take their horses with them on special hunting excursions!

The railways were to make a huge difference to the leisure activities of the Victorians. Not only were opportunities for holidays and day trips increased, sporting events also grew in popularity. Special trains and trips were run to take people to the races, and cricket or football matches.

In 1888 the Football League was founded. This was made up of professional teams. It would have been impossible for the first teams to have travelled to play away matches without regular trains. So the railways were very important in the development of professional football in Britain.

But many of these developments only affected the better off people in Britain. For most working people, the important changes were the cheap day returns that many railway companies started to offer.

In 1871 Bank Holidays were introduced and so began the great British tradition of the day at the seaside, along with sticks of rock, candy-floss, walks along the pier, fun-fair rides and fish and chips. The first fish and chip shops appeared in the 1860s.

Facing the huge amount of people going to Brighton and the seashore, the gentry had then two possibilities: having a yacht or going abroad, and that was the beginning of the French and Italian Riviera, e.g. the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, and then to the mountains, first curling, to go sledging, bobsleigh, ice-skating, and then a Norwegian sport, ski. The first British ski club in 1903.
Source 2. This poster is advertising the seaside resort of Swanage. London & South Western Railway Company produced it.

Source 5. This is an advertisement for Hudson's washing soap. It features a famous cricketer from the Victorian Era, W. G. Grace.
Timeline:

1835 Great Western Railway Opened.

1840s Development of Brighton as a popular holiday resort. A cheap day return from London cost 8 shillings.

1841 Thomas Cook runs his first trip, hiring a train to take 500 people.

1851 Many of the visitors to the Great Exhibition travel there on Thomas Cook excursions.

1855 Thomas Cook organises his first trip abroad to the International Exhibition in Paris.

1863 Football Association founded.

1865 The Boat Race between Oxford and Cambridge Universities becomes an annual event.

1871 Bank Holidays Act gives people who worked in banks specific days off. This idea quickly spread, giving many workers more time for holidays and leisure activities.

1880's Thomas Cook and Sons begin to own hotels as well as organise trips. They began to own and manage hotels in Egypt because local ones were supposed to be unhygienic!

1888 Football League was established.