

SRD – 8F

Write a report to highlight the inequality between the rich and poor in Edwardian England. How did their lives differ?

Read the following pages to find evidence to support your report.

The Rich of Edwardian England



Growing up

The upper classes, whose large incomes came mainly from the rents of land and property, lived very pleasant lives, with large houses and many servants. Their children had a long and leisurely education, starting under governesses at home, followed, for the boys, by public school and then a few years at University in Oxford and Cambridge. Girls often remained with their governesses and tutors until their teens, but more were beginning to go to expensive boarding schools, and a few even went to university.

After finishing their education, the young men usually had no need to work, unless they wanted to. If they felt that they wanted to do something, then the army or navy, the church or politics were considered respectable careers – in fact, these careers were mostly unpaid anyway. It was not considered proper for a gentleman to work for money!

Girls, after a few years of attending balls, usually married a wealthy young man and settled down to a life full of amusements.

A year in the life of the rich

In the **spring** they would move to their country houses.

The **summer** would be spent in the London home for the season of balls, operas, theatres and sporting events.

The **autumn** would see them in their Scottish estate or Highland hotel for the shooting and fishing

Winter was often spent travelling abroad travelling in a warmer climate.

A day in the life of a rich Edwardian lady

8am	Get up Have breakfast: Porridge; omelette with ham; eggs; fish – cod or whiting; cold chicken; potted meat; rolls; toast; bread; jam and marmalade; tea and coffee. (All of this, on the table, every day)
9am	Give orders to the servants – say what meals wanted and how many guests. Supervise cooking and cleaning – not do any herself of course)
11am	Visit shops or friends
1pm	Lunch, followed by visits, reading, embroidery
3.30pm	Afternoon tea, entertaining friends, or visiting friends for tea
5.30pm	Supervising arrangements for dinner
6.30pm	Dress for dinner
7.30	Dinner, followed by talking, songs in the drawing room, dancing
11pm – 2am	Bed, time depending on the company and how the evening was spent.

Mistresses sometimes bought some of the clothing for servants who lived in the house. Here is part of an advertisement from a paper of 1908:

Cheap clothing suitable for Servants

Vests	3¾d each (1½p)
Petticoats	1/6¾d each (8p)
Stockings	1/9 for two pairs (9p)
Non-creaking shoes	2/11 a pair (14½p)

Dying

The average age that rich people lived to in Edwardian England was 55 years old

The Poor of Edwardian England



The ordinary working-class family lived a very different life from that of a rich family.

Work

The average wage of a working man in 1901 was 85p a week, though a highly skilled worker could earn as much as £2.

They had, of course, no servants – it was the wives and children of the working class who were the servants of the middle and upper classes.

Working hours were long – ten hours a day from Monday to Friday, and six and a half on Saturday. They usually got half a day off on a Sunday.

Children of twelve and over could go to school for half a day only and work the rest of the time. For this work, they were paid about 12½ pence.

There was no sick pay if workers were ill and when you were too old to work, there was no pension.

Home

Their homes were often in poor slums or in big blocks of tenements (flats).

If you could not work, your home became the Poor House, where families were split up.

Food

The diet of a poor manual labourer, his wife and 3 children:

Breakfast: bread, butter, tea

Dinner: fish, bread, tea

Tea: bread, butter, onions, tea

Supper: none

A day in the life of an Edwardian housemaid

6.30am	Clean fireplace, blacklead them; start cleaning house; heat water and take it to the mistresses bedroom
8am	Help prepare and serve breakfast
9am	Get orders for the day; clean upstairs and down; tidy up
11am	Help the Cook prepare and cook lunch
1.30pm	Help serve lunch
2pm	Clear away; wash up; finish tidying house; polish silver and cutlery; ironing; mending
3.30pm	Prepare, serve and clear away tea
5.30pm	Start preparing dinner. Help the Cook
7.30pm	Help serve dinner, clear away, wash up.
9.30pm	Check fires, prepare house for the night.
10.30pm	Bed, unless the family have a party and need late supper.

For all this work, the maid would be paid between 25 and 37 pence a week. She would have one half day, or one evening free a week.

Dying

The average age that poor people lived to in Edwardian England was 30 years old. Many Victorians struggled to understand and explain poverty. Was this because of circumstances beyond the individual's control or the direct result of their indolence? To discourage dependency, workhouse conditions were worse than the lowest standard of the independent labourer.

A country of two nations

Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different breeding, are fed by different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws ... THE RICH AND THE POOR.

This extract from Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Sybil*, published in 1845, goes to the heart of one of the most controversial subjects of 19th century history - the

extent to which industrialisation improved or depressed living standards, and the ways in which the poor were treated.

For the first half of the 19th century the rural and urban poor had much in common: unsanitary and overcrowded housing, low wages, poor diet, insecure employment and the dreaded effects of sickness and old age. By 1851 the census showed the urban population was larger than that of the rural areas. Towns provided a wider range of jobs, but unskilled and casual workers continued to struggle with low wages and irregular incomes, the fear of accidents and the dread of slipping into that 'sunken sixth' of the workforce, the 'residuum' so close to the criminal underworld which Dickens wrote about.

Optimists and pessimists

The debate around industrialisation and poverty - its nature, extent, and impact - continues to sharply divide historians. In general terms, 'optimists' argue that industrialisation brought higher wages, and a better standard of living, whereas 'pessimists' argue that the quality of life for workers deteriorated especially between 1780 and 1850, with only limited improvements for some skilled sectors before the 1870s.

It would seem that only in the last quarter of the century did the standard of living for the industrial labourer began to rise, as prices fell rapidly and sanitation, housing and health improvements changed the urban environment. Whilst industrialisation brought a number of dramatic changes and opportunities, insecurity and the resultant downwards spiral into poverty remained a deeply entrenched continuity.

Yet, many Victorians struggled to understand and explain poverty. Was it because of personal misfortune, because of social circumstances beyond an individual's control, or, the direct result of a person's character, their laziness and indolence? Were the poor, therefore, 'deserving' or 'undeserving'? Who was responsible for those who became so poor that they could not maintain themselves and how should these paupers be cared for?

The labouring poor

At the beginning of the 19th century poverty was regarded as the natural condition of the labouring poor - those who worked with their hands. The fluctuations of harvests, the disruptions of war and the fine line between subsistence and penury were seen as inevitable and difficult to change.

Since the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 relief had been available for the poor within their parish, financed by the poor rate (a tax based on land and

buildings), with 'outdoor relief' and the workhouse. Outdoor relief provided payments for a range of needs, or relief in kind such as clothing and food, with the intent of enabling the able-bodied poor to remain at home.

The workhouse provided 'indoor relief', for the sick, elderly or orphaned - the 'impotent' poor who were unable to support themselves. The principle of settlement, established in 1662, meant that travelling paupers could be returned to their home parish, usually that of their birth for relief, unless they carried a certificate which promised that their parish would reimburse the parish where they became dependent.

Conclusion

Penny savings banks were established to provide safe havens for small savers, while, in some parts of the country, early forms of insurance companies offered policies to pay for death benefits. High levels of infant mortality meant that, in some cases, insurance policies were taken out on babies' lives almost as soon as they were born. Even more important was the informal, mutual support within working class neighbourhoods for help in 'making ends meet'. This ranged from that of family and friends, the loan of money or goods, the taking in of lodgers or washing, and the availability of credit, resort to pawnshops and local moneylenders. These communal resources were all used to avoid the stigma of entry into the workhouse or the final indignity of a pauper funeral. Declining levels of poor relief during the century, therefore, did not necessarily mean that the needs of the poor were falling, only that they were continuing to find other ways of supporting themselves in times of need.