



1

UNDERSTAND KEY CONCEPTS Read the texts and give each paragraph a title.

Urbanisation Technology and Industrialisation

Economic Boom Social Unrest



The Victorian Age was also called 'The Age of Machinery' because technological improvements accelerated the process of industrialisation which had started in the previous century and continued to change British life. Textile industries continued to flourish but iron and steel became the leading industries. The cutting of new canals and the building of new roads and railways, which made transport easier and cheaper, resulted in an efficient communication network to carry goods inland and to the great shipping ports of Liverpool, Bristol and London.



These transformations also affected the population and resulted in the migration of people from the countryside to the industrial areas in search of jobs. Urbanisation increased and many of the cities and towns of the North and Midlands, the most industrialised areas, were actually created in this period and within a few years the population of London and other industrial cities doubled.



In the first decades of the century, the effects of industrialisation were very negative for the poorer classes. The policy pursued by both political parties was liberalism which led to the subordination of labourers' needs to industrial and commercial interests, with appalling consequences. Harsh working conditions in factories and mines, terrible living conditions, high food prices and economic depression caused much discontent, and labourers began to organise themselves into working-class movements. Their discontent was voiced in 1838 by the Chartists, a group of radicals and workers who presented to parliament a document called the 'People's Charter' advocating a radical reform of parliament. The document was presented, and rejected, twice. Conditions improved after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 with a consequent decrease in the price of bread.



Industrial expansion also brought great wealth for the ruling classes and Britain became a champion of free trade across her huge Empire and the leading industrial power in the world. The Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace in London illustrated the accomplishments of industrial Britain and her pre-eminence among European nations. Britain was looked upon as the world centre for industry, commerce and banking (although by the end of Victoria's reign her industrial advantage was being challenged successfully by other nations such as the US and Germany). The Exhibition was the first truly international exhibition of manufactured goods. During the five months that the exhibition was open in Hyde Park, over 6 million people came to see more than 100,000 exhibits from all over the world. Housed in a huge steel and glass structure known as the Crystal Palace, it was an opportunity for Britain's manufacturers to showcase the quality of their workmanship.

2



READ IMAGES Look at the illustrations.

- A. What does the graph show?
- B. Look at the second image and its caption. What do you learn about living conditions for workers?

3



UNDERSTAND CONTEXT What was the Great Exhibition and how did it represent Britain?





Living conditions for workers were often intolerable. Reports from the period describe families cramped into dirty single-room dwellings with very little furniture, forced to share a bed. Drinking water was polluted with sewerage which flowed in open drains down the middle of narrow alleyways. The poorest of the poor lived in cellar homes, the lowest floor of a house, partly underground, which was rife with damp and flooded frequently. Sometimes animals such as geese and pigs shared the living space with their owners.

↑ A cellar home
in a drawing
by John Leech
(c. 1855).