

What Was Life Like?

- Life was very hard for poor people during the Victorian era.
- In 1837, at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, only wealthy children could afford to go to school.
- Poor children, even as young as four years old, had to work to help support their families.
- Most mine, factory and mill owners did not think anything was wrong with giving jobs, particularly nasty ones, to children.
- There were no laws to protect working children.



What Jobs Did Victorian Children Do?



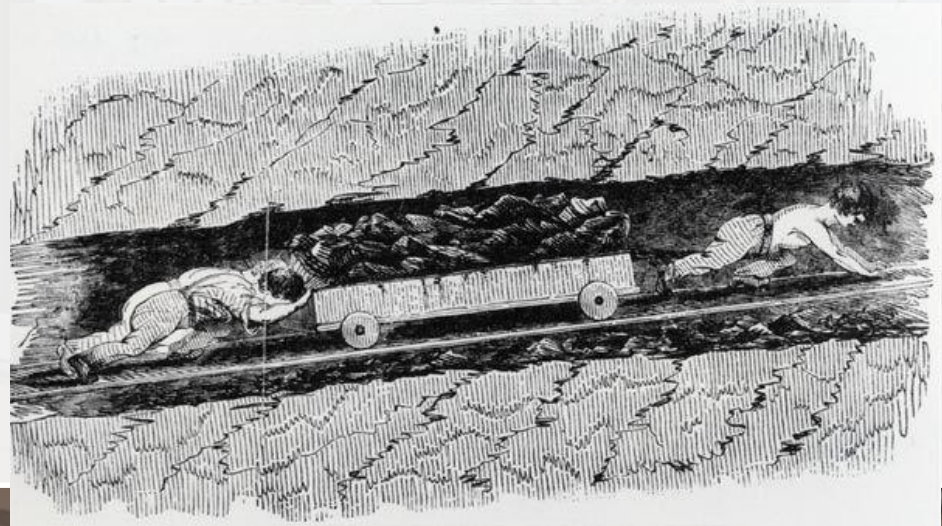
Children did various kinds of jobs and many were unsafe, poorly paid and damaging to their health.

They included:

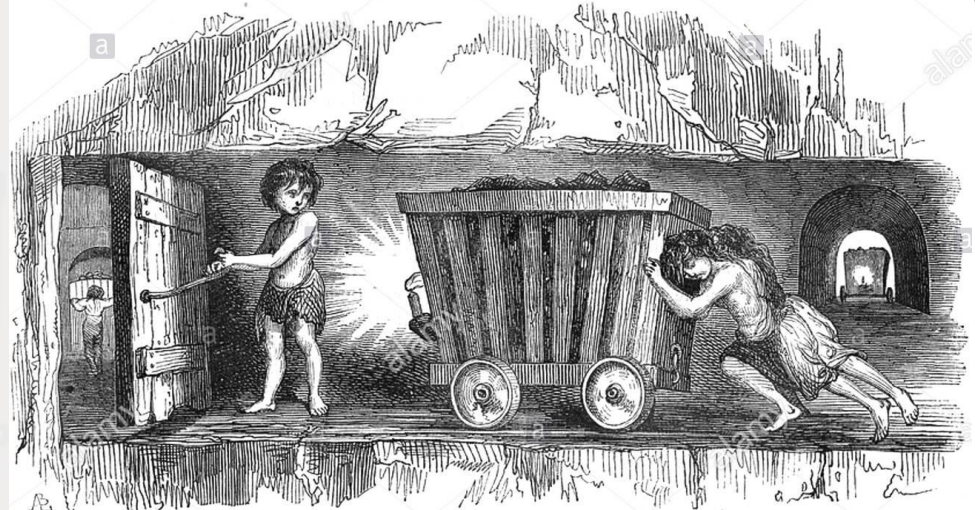
- chimney sweeps
- servants
- mill workers
- factory workers
- working in coal mines

Children in the Coal Mines

- Many children worked in coal mines. They were extremely dangerous places to work; roofs caved in, there were sometimes gas explosions, tunnels collapsed and workers got all sorts of injuries. There were very few safety rules.
- One of the common dangers for children was shifting coal. To do this, the children had to bring the coal through the tunnels and small shafts. This would require the children to continually bend down and this led to many children suffering growth problems.



Younger children, as young as 5, often worked as "trappers". It was their job to open and shut the doors in the tunnels to allow the air to circulate through them. They would spend all day sitting on their own in the pitch black.



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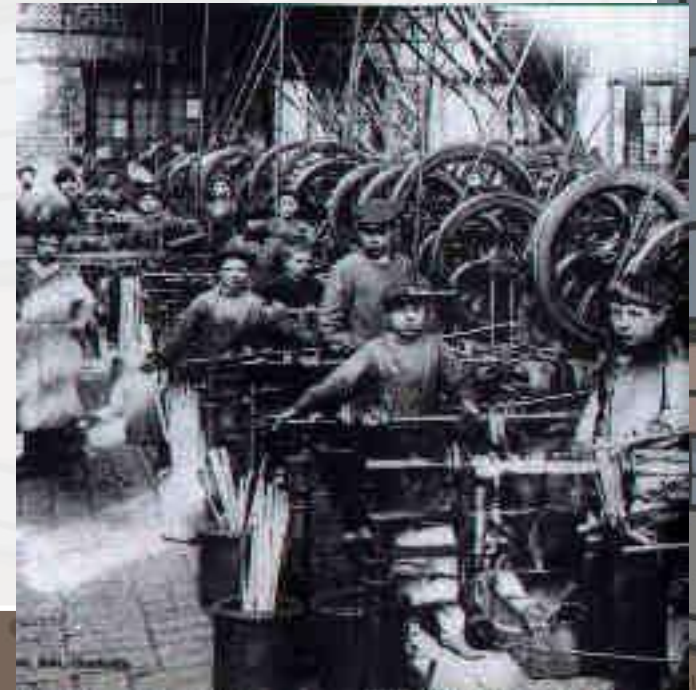
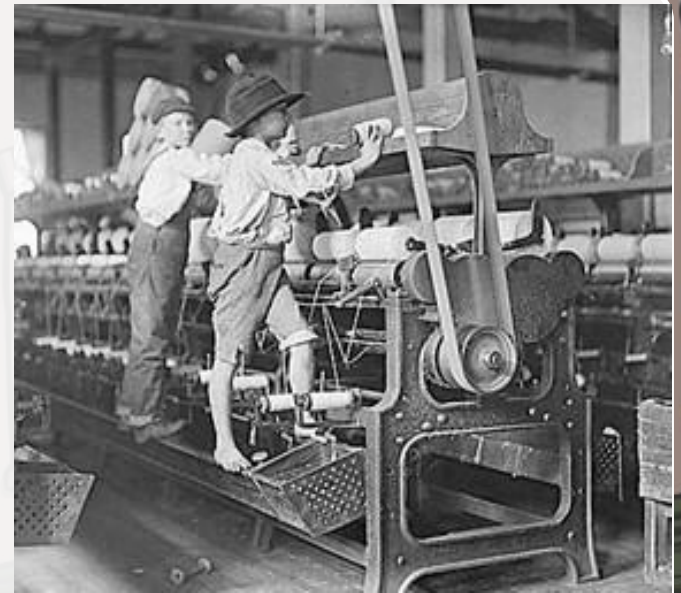
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Older children were employed as "coal bearers". This involved carrying loads of coal on their backs in big baskets.

Child Mill Workers

- As in mines and factories, thousands of children also worked in cotton mills, where cotton fabric was made. Children spent most of their working hours at machines with little or no time for fresh air or exercise.
- Many children fell ill or had serious accidents.



Chimney Sweeps

- Orphans and homeless children were sold to employers to become chimney sweeps.
- This happened because children were cheap and they could not complain.
- Boys were forced to climb up through the narrow, winding passages of chimneys in large houses in order to clean them.
- Children suffered many cuts, grazes and bruises on their knees, elbows and thighs. It was a dirty and dangerous job.
- In 1832, a law was introduced forbidding the use of boys for sweeping chimneys; unfortunately, we know that this law was ignored!



Life as a Domestic Servant



- Many girls from poor families would go to work as servants in big houses.
- Servants were paid very little money.
- Many had unpleasant jobs to do like cleaning out fireplaces and cleaning the kitchens.
- They often had to start work very early in the morning, and could not go to sleep until their employers had gone to bed.

Changes for the Better

Throughout Queen Victoria's reign, new laws were passed to make it against the law for young children to go to work.

However, there were still many children, over the age of 9, at work when Queen Victoria died in 1901.

Today, fortunately there are strict laws on how old children have to be to have a job, and about the hours they can work.

What job would you have done if you were alive in the Victorian era?

