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In 1850, the writer Charles Reade visited the town of Sheffield in the north of England. He didn’t stay long! He described it as ‘perhaps the most hideous town in creation’. He reported that black smoke blocked out the sun and ‘sparkling streams entered the town… but soon got filthy, full of rubbish, clogged with dirt and bubbling with rotten, foul-smelling gases’. So what made Sheffield stink?

**A changing nation**

Sheffield was no different to many other English towns at this time. Places such as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham were equally bad. Why, then, had these towns become such horrible places to live? The answer: once a factory had been built, people would flood in from the countryside to find work. Factory owners then had to build homes for the workers. Houses were built quickly and cheaply, and were crammed close together with narrow alleys between them. Built in terraces, the houses were also built back-to-back to save space and money. There was no planning or quality control and some homes were even built without foundations. In 1842, one factory owner went to visit his workers in a row of newly built houses and found that they had all blown down after a storm the night before.

**Wise Up Words**

Do you have to share a bedroom? Imagine what it would be like to share your bed with up to seven others! A survey in 1839 found that out of 3000 families in Bury, 773 of them slept with three or four to a bed; 209 had five in a bed; 67 had six in a bed and in 15 families, seven people slept in one bed.

**Source A:** A plan of back-to-back housing in Nottingham, 1845.

**Source B:** Back-to-back houses in Liverpool.

**Source C:** Sheffield in 1750.

**Source D:** Sheffield around 1850.

**Source E:** In 1801, only eight towns in England, Wales and Scotland had more than 50,000 people living there: Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London and Manchester. By 1900, there were over 60.

**Mission Objectives**

- Investigate what life was like for thousands of ordinary people in newly expanded industrial towns like Sheffield in the nineteenth century.

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4.1A **What made Sheffield stink?**

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4 **A changing Sheffield**

The dramatic change in Sheffield is best illustrated by two images: **Source C** is a picture painted of Sheffield in 1750. What words would you use to describe it? What are the important features?

**Source D** shows Sheffield about 100 years later, in the middle of the nineteenth century. What is different? What now dominates the town?

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**Wise Up Words**

back-to-back cholera epidemic terraces

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4.1B **Be a Top Historian**

Good historians can spot the causes of things… and their consequences (or results). So what were the causes of Britain’s overcrowded towns in the 1800s – and what were the consequences?
**Overcrowding**

Almost all the houses in the largest towns across Britain were crowded, usually with five or more people living in one small room, which they rented from a local landlord or the factory owners themselves. In 1847, 40 people were found sharing one room in Liverpool!

**Sewage**

The disposal of sewage was a major problem. None of the houses had toilets indoors, so the best some families could manage was a bucket in the corner of the room. This would be emptied now and again, either into the street or stored outside the door until there was enough to sell to the farmer as manure. Occasionally, there was a street toilet (a deep hole with a wooden shed over it) but this would have to be shared with 30 or 40 other families. Sometimes a pump provided water but often the water came from the local river... and this would be filthy. There were no rubbish collections, litter bins, street cleaners, sewers or fresh running water.

**Source A:** A doctor describes a street in Scotland for a government report in 1842.

“There is a huge dunghill here. The owner sells it. He gets more money for older dung. The pile smells so badly that people nearby have to keep their food covered because it stinks of the dunghill.”

**Medical problems**

Sewage trickled down the streets and into nearby rivers. Yet, most families washed themselves in and drank from the same river. It was little wonder that disease thrived in towns. In 1840, one in every three children died before they reached five. In Leeds, the average age of death for a working-class man was 19 and in Manchester it was 17.

**Wise Up Words**

cholera

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**4.1B What made Sheffield stink?**

**KEY FOR SOURCE B:**

A. Drinking in pubs was a favourite pastime. People mostly drank beer but gin was also common.
B. A dunghill
C. Night soilmen taking away sewage to sell
D. Crime was common and there was no national police force until the 1890s.
E. A shared street toilet
F. A water pump, which often pulled up water from the river.
G. People used the river to wash their clothes and collect drinking water.
H. Water carriers sold water in the streets (but some just got their water from the local river)
I. Rats, a common sight in nineteenth-century towns.
J. Whole families living in one room
K. This family is sick. Cholera was the new killer disease – those who caught it turned black and blue, got violently sick and had terrible diarrhoea. About half of those who got it died within 24 hours. In some areas, the cemeteries had to be closed because they were too full.
L. Costermongers hired carts, bought food from local markets and wandered the streets selling door-to-door.
M. A factory
N. The houses were in a poor state of repair. Landlords cared little about the state of the houses – and there were no laws to make sure they looked after their properties.

**Work**

1. Make a list of factors about life in towns that might lead to poor health and disease.
   - Overcrowding
   - Sewage
   - Lack of clean water
   - Poor housing
   - Disease and illness
2. Make another list of ways the government could improve living conditions.
   - Better sanitation
   - Clean water supply
   - Improved housing
   - Public health awareness
3. Imagine you were unlucky enough to spend a day looking around the streets and visiting houses such as the one featured in Source B. Write a letter home to a friend describing what you have seen.
   - Can you explain why industrial towns like Sheffield expanded so quickly in the nineteenth century?
   - Can you explain what problems this expansion brought with it?
7.3 Invasion of India

In 1497 a Portuguese explorer called Vasco da Gama discovered how to get to India by sea. Soon, many countries were sending ships to India to trade. At first the ships simply reached an Indian port, swapped their goods with local traders for silk, spices, cotton or tea, and brought these home to sell for a big profit. After a few years, and with the permission of Indian rulers, the traders began to set up permanent trading stations. These were large warehouses surrounded by huge fences and guarded by men with guns. So who ran the trading stations and how did they work?

Which countries?
The British, French and Dutch were the main countries with trading stations in India in the early years, but the Danish and Portuguese traded there too (see Source B).

The East India Company
The British trading stations in India were all run by the East India Company. Set up in 1600, it had been sending ships all over the world for years. The ships sailed full of cheap British goods, and swapped them for goods in countries as far away as Japan and China. Then they brought the fine china, silk, coffee and spices back to Britain to sell. Both the businessmen in charge of the company, and the kings and queens to whom they paid taxes, made a fortune from this trade (see Source C).

The fighting begins
The East India Company first set up trading posts in Surat (1612), Madras (1638) and Bombay (1668). In the 1700s the Company began to take more Indian land. It had its own army and navy and used them against the rulers of India. At the Battle of Plassey in 1757, for example, around 3000 Company soldiers (2200 of whom were local Indians) defeated an Indian army of over 40,000 led by prince Siraj-ud-Daulah. The Company fought against other European nations too – and took over their trading posts!

The Company expands
Over the following decades, various Indian rulers were either beaten in battle or played off against each other, so that more of India came under British rule. By the mid-1850s, most of India was controlled by the Brits… but a major rebellion, one that shocked the world, was just around the corner!

Be a Top Historian
Top historians can spot turning points in history. These are points of great change, leaving things different from how they were before. In what way can the Battle of Plassey be viewed as a ‘turning point’?

Today, India is a single, independent country. However, when the British first started trading there, people used the word ‘India’ to mean the present-day countries of Pakistan, Burma (Myanmar), Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The British gave the name India to the whole lot!

Fact!
SOURCE A: The British trading station at Bombay in 1731.

SOURCE B: India’s trading ports – and the nations that founded them. Which continent are these nations from?

SOURCE C: How to make a fortune from trade.

SOURCE D: A cigarette card showing the Company’s victory at Plassey. They were led by Robert Clive (known soon after as ‘Clive of India’).
Assessing Your Learning 2

Was the British Empire a good or bad thing?

Good historians have to know their facts. It’s impossible to be a successful history student without knowing the correct names, dates and places linked to the topics you’re studying. But history is full of opinions too – and it’s just as important to be aware of them.

The British Empire is a great example of a topic full of amazing events, memorable dates and fascinating facts… but it’s also a topic on which people have different opinions. Some are very positive about it, whilst others say it was a bad thing. Some opinions are mixed. Read through the opinions on page 21 carefully – talk with a partner or ask your teacher about any opinions you don’t quite understand.

Be a Top Historian

Good historians don’t just decide whether or not they agree with an opinion, but how far they agree with it and why.

Task 1

Make two lists, one of all the negative things about the British Empire and one of all the positive things. Don’t just use the opinions on these pages to help you, use the knowledge gained from your studies on the British Empire. Are there any that don’t fit into either list? Explain why.

Task 2

As you can see, the British Empire has always been the subject of fierce debate. There have even been calls to ban the teaching of it in schools! Imagine that your headteacher has BANNED the teaching of the British Empire at your school. Write a letter explaining whether you support the decision or not. The way your letter will be assessed is laid out below:

A good letter will…
- say whether you agree with the decision or not
- list some good and/or bad points about the Empire.

A better letter will…
- say whether we should study the British Empire
- give several reasons why you should or shouldn’t study the Empire and back them up with facts and figures
- be structured like a letter and use key terms.

The best letter will…
- meet all the above criteria
- use all the correct historical terms
- cover both sides of the argument
- explain the needs of modern History students and what you think should be taught about the past.

How big is the British Empire today?

There are several small colonies that are still part of the British Empire. Today they are called British Overseas Territories. Carry out your own research to find out where they are, label them on a world map and write a short history of each one.

Assessing your work

Look at the success criteria for this task to help you plan and evaluate your work.

A good letter will…
- say whether you agree with the decision or not
- list some good and/or bad points about the Empire.

A better letter will…
- say whether we should study the British Empire
- give several reasons why you should or shouldn’t study the Empire and back them up with facts and figures
- be structured like a letter and use key terms.

The best letter will…
- meet all the above criteria
- use all the correct historical terms
- cover both sides of the argument
- explain the needs of modern History students and what you think should be taught about the past.

The British Empire was about three things – God, gold and glory! It’s a myth that it was about helping countries. All the empire builders cared about was converting natives to Christianity, personal glory and making money.

The British did some awful things – their role in the slave trade, the Amritsar Massacre in India and the use of concentration camps in the Boer War, for example. The British thought they were racially superior to the people they conquered. We say it’s wrong for the racist Nazis to take over Europe in World War Two, so why isn’t it wrong for racist Brits to try and take over the rest of the world?

The British Empire was better than other empires at the time. The French tried to make Africans into Frenchmen… or else! And Belgium and Portugal ran their colonies very harshly. Britain thought of itself more as a mother country helping the colonies to develop. The countries it ruled are now some of the richest and most powerful in the world – like the USA, Australia and South Africa. What an achievement!

The British brought law and order, transport, education, banking and medicine to places all over the world. They left great universities, team sports, the English language and the idea of democracy. Of course the British Empire was a force for good!

The British brought law and order, transport, education, banking and medicine to places all over the world. They left great universities, team sports, the English language and the idea of democracy. Of course the British Empire was a force for good!

The British Empire was a force for good!

Task 1 Task 2

TOP TIP: Don’t just copy out the opinions – try to put them in your own words.

Which skill? This task is making you identify and describe how people have interpreted the British Empire in different ways.