



Experience Life in Victorian Britain

Hall Place in Victorian Times

During the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) Hall Place was let to tenants as a private home. In the late 17th Century, the house became a boarding school for boys and it remained so for most of the Victorian era. We know some things about life at Hall Place during its time from surviving historical documents. For example:

In 1839 it was home to 80 boys, the headmaster and his family, 5 teachers and several servants. The headmaster was a gentleman called John James Barton who regularly sent school reports to parents.

The hours were long for the pupils, staff and servants with some seasonal variation. In the summer months the boys were woken at 6.00am. However, by 6.15 everyone would be gathered in the large schoolroom (presumably the Great Hall) ready to listen to scripture followed by prayers.

The Victorians considered cleanliness to be a virtue and so the boys were given ten minutes for washing. Should the boys be found to be unclean they were fined accordingly!

At 11.00am the boys were all given a break outside for a quarter of an hour and whilst they exercised, windows and doors were opened to refresh the classrooms.

The lessons which all pupils received on a weekly basis were - English grammar and composition, Greek or German, Latin, French, mathematics or arithmetic, globes, geography and maps, orthography (grammar and spelling) and writing, readings in history and poetry, lessons on objects and scriptures. Additional studies of music, drawing and singing were also provided.

The boys were given Wednesdays and Saturdays off, however, they were expected to devote time to subjects such as chemistry, dancing, drill (P.E.), elocution (speaking properly) and music.

In October 1849, John Barton decided to relocate the school to Brighton and placed the contents of the house with the auctioneer Mr J. Callow. The auction catalogue lists all the furniture including 'a grand pianoforte, brewing utensils, a stack of meadow hay, a pony, two fat hogs and a cow!'

After the school moved out, Maitland Dashwood (the owner of Hall Place) set about making alterations and renovations. Once complete it was re-let as a private house to several rich tenants including Emile d'Erlanger who was a founder member of the Channel Tunnel Scheme.



Victorian Drama

Life in the Victorian period was very different to modern times. This session aims to help children understand these differences. This session is designed to build upon the work and knowledge that children have already gained of the Victorian period at school.

This session can be taught with 30-60 children divided into four groups. Each group will require at least one adult to support them. The aim is to construct a short drama play and act it out to the rest of the class.

Drama is a great way for children to express what they know and those that find written composition a challenge often shine when acting or directing. The session starts with a brief introduction to each of the four topics to be covered

- A visit to the seaside
- Chimney sweeps
- The rich house
- The school

Once the children and adults are in four groups each is given one of the topics and a prompt sheet. The prompt sheet will have a list of ideas to include in the play, basic points that define each topic for the Victorian period. It will take the imagination of the group to develop them into a short story that will be acted out at the end of the session.

Each group will be given an area of the Great Hall to rehearse in. This area will contain props to inspire the imagination including items of costume and objects related to the topic. There will also be furniture set up to use.

Time is then given for the groups to plan and rehearse their short plays. They only need to be 2-3 minutes long but must show what they think life would have been like in Victorian times. Each group will take it in turns to perform their play, prompted by the rest of the class shouting "lights, camera, action!"

It is entirely up to the children how they wish to perform their play. They can do it as a silent movie, a detective story, comedy or full blown musical.

Once we have seen each group's performance, we then gather around to discuss what we have learnt from the plays and how different life was back in Victorian times.