

# Unit: From Cradle To Grave



How poor was Britain in 1900?

**Aim:**

To understand how poor Britain was in 1900 and we discovered how bad the situation was

## Recap:

Discuss with your neighbours everything you can remember about Britain at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (women, living conditions etc). When you're happy write a list of features of life in 1900



On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1901, Britain fell into mourning. Queen Victoria had died after 63 years on the throne. Her death at the start of the century seemed to many the end of an era and therefore the dawn of a new era, a new and better Britain.

For the vast majority of Britons, life was hard, they were living in extreme poverty



# What was it like to be poor at the beginning of the 20th Century?

The poor had to depend on private charities or poor relief (limited financial help) from the government. These charities offered poor people help in the following ways...

Complete this diagram



Charities





By 1905, there were nearly 1000 private charities in London alone! In towns and cities throughout Britain there were thousands of abandoned children. They lived on the streets begging and thieving to survive. Many of course died from starvation disease and neglect.

There were several charities set up to help with children, by 1905, Dr Barnardo had set up many children's homes around the country, successfully saving nearly 60,000 street children from death, and improving the lives of 500,000 more.



You may have seen a  
Barnardo's charity  
shop, still working to  
help poor children  
today



## What had the government done so far?

There was definitely a slowly changing attitude by the government towards the poor and children, much to do with the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the need for new types of skills. The Government had began ensuring more children went to school, but poverty was a massive issue.

The Poor Law was the most dreaded and feared type of help provided by the state. Workhouses provided food and shelter for the poor. These workhouses were grim and conditions were awful. Despite living in such terrible conditions, most poor people hated accepting relief as they'd be labelled a pauper what was shameful to them.



Most Victorians believed that the poor were somehow responsible for their own poverty. As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century began, many began accepting there were social and economic reasons for poverty and it wasn't always their own fault.

I didn't want to go to the hospital because it used to be the workhouse. I remember it as the workhouse. My grandma had had to go in there and she died there. She got a pauper's burial. I nearly had to go in when my dad was out of a job for three months but my mother took in extra washing and I had to help her and I missed school. My mother kept saying we had to stay out of the workhouse because people would call us names and we'd be the lowest of the low in the village. I knew that it was a horrible place, the rules were horrible and as far as I'm concerned it will always be the horrible workhouse.

**From an interview with an 80 year old Ada Haigh, in 1975, explaining why she did not want to go into the local hospital that year.**



**Dinner time at Marylebone workhouse, 1900**



Look carefully at this photograph, discuss with your neighbours any ideas, questions or thoughts you have, we'll then discuss as a class.





## Why did poverty come to the public's attention at the start of the 20th Century?

The main reason was the work of charities in raising awareness and asking the government to do something about it. The Salvation Army was a Christian group trying to turn criminals and prostitutes to God. They also provided soup and bread (Soup Kitchens).

What do you think of the term Salvation Army

The Salvation Army, started by William and Catherine Booth wore smart uniforms, were structured and play brass instruments to attract the crowds (hopefully donating money). The main purpose of the Salvation Army was to help give purpose to people's lives, they did this by providing training (brickwork, farming) as well as find them jobs.

William & Catherine Booth



Giving  
Hope  
Today





**Charles Booth**

Charles Booth (no relation) was born into a wealth Liverpool family. He refused to accept that 25% of the of the working population were living in poverty, they were after all working.


He set up his own team of investigators, over 17 years, investigating the living conditions, income and spending of over 4000 people. He reported his findings on a regular basis in his works called '*Life and Labour of the People in London*'

Booth concluded that 31% of Londoners were living below the **poverty line** this meant they didn't have enough money to buy food, shelter and clothing.


Booth worked out that 85% of people living in poverty were poor because of unemployment and low wages, in other words, poverty wasn't their own fault.

Summarise Booth's findings into a couple of bullet points

The Streets are coloured according to the general condition of the inhabitants, as under:-

 Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.


 Very poor, casual. Chronic want.

 Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family.

 Mixed. Some comfortable, others poor.

 Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.

 Middle-class. Well-to-do.

 Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.

*A combination of colours— as dark blue and black, or pink and red— indicates that the street contains a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours.*



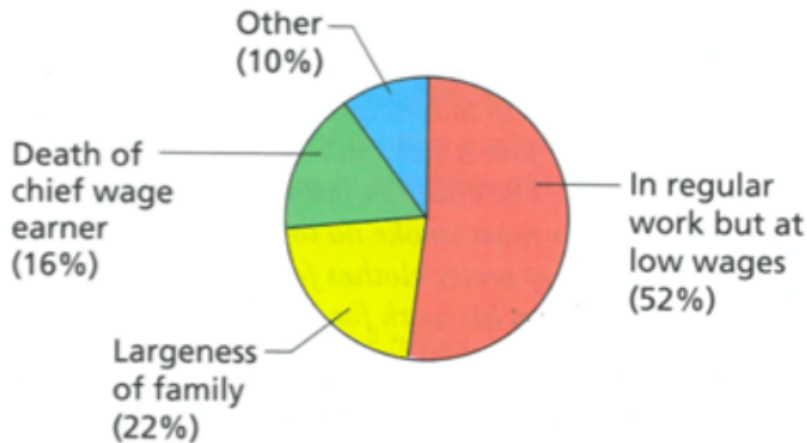
Was this the same in other parts of the country...



Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree was a York based chocolate manufacturer. They were Quakers (They believed there was something of God in everyone and everything), treating their workers really well.

Rowntree was fascinated by Charles Booth's findings and wanted to see if it was the same in York. He too, after his investigations found the nearly 30% of the families in York were living in poverty. His book was called *Poverty: a Study of Town Life*

## Seebohm Rowntree



Seebohm Rowntree's analysis of the main reasons for primary poverty in York, 1900-01.

Write a short letter to the Prime Minister trying to **persuade** him to act, summarise Booth and Rowntree's findings...

## Primary Poverty 10% of York

No matter how hard a family worked, they would never earn enough to provide themselves with adequate food, shelter and clothing. These families didn't stand a chance.

## Secondary Poverty 20% of York

These families could just about feed, clothe and shelter themselves, provided there were no additional calls on their income. These families were living on the edge.

Rowntree Video Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rN3WG1SMss>





There had always been poor people in Britain, why did they become so politically important in the early 1900s?

**Rowntree and Charles Booth's works...** Read by thousands, shocking many, especially the elite. A young MP named Winston Churchill would soon be in a position to do something about it

**The Boer War...** In 1899, the British Army began fighting the Boer settlers in South Africa. Plenty of young men volunteered to fight but were rejected as unfit. As many as 2/3's of men failed the medical. This startled the government, particularly as the German Empire and her army were incredibly strong and getting stronger.

**Strong economies in Germany and USA...** These economies were highly successful because of the skills and hard work of their workforces. It looked as if the British workforce hadn't got the strength or stamina to compete with these new world powers

**The Labour Party was created...** In 1900, all of the socialist groups in Britain joined together to create one party that pledged to get better living and working conditions for all and distribute the countries wealth more fairly. The Liberal Party were worried they would lose votes to Labour.

Rank the 4 reasons discussed from most to least important in answering why poverty became a political issue. Justify your reasoning...