Period of mid- and late- 19th century in England, covering the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901. This period was one of significant industrial and urban development in Britain, and also saw a massive expansion of the British Empire. In domestic politics the period is particularly notable for the rivalry between the Conservative prime minister Benjamin Disraeli and his Liberal successor William Ewart Gladstone.

Queen Victoria  Victoria became queen on 20 June 1837, and enjoyed the longest reign of any British monarch. In domestic affairs and politics she relied initially on the shrewd advice of her Whig prime minister Lord Melbourne, but later clashed with his Tory successor Robert Peel, the founder of the modern police force. She was also strongly influenced by the views of her husband, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, whom she married in 1840. The high point of her reign came in 1851 with the opening of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, London, which was organized by Albert. The exhibition was designed in order to display ‘the Industries of all Nations’, but in fact came to symbolize the technological and industrial achievements of Victorian England.

Colonial expansion  During Queen Victoria's reign the British Empire was extended significantly, and often by means of military force, in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Hong Kong, for example, became part of the Empire as a result of the first Opium Wars of 1839 to 1842, and Kowloon was later added to the colony after a second Opium War of 1856 to 1858. Other additions to the Empire made in the same period include New Zealand (1840), Northern Somalia (1884), Burma (1886), and Egypt, which became a British protectorate after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The centre of the Empire, however, was India, which was controlled by the East India Company until 1858. Control of India eventually passed to the British crown after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and, in 1877, Benjamin Disraeli's government conferred the title of Empress of India upon Queen Victoria.

Domestic politics  In domestic politics the Victorian period saw the development of a number of extra-parliamentary pressure groups, such as the Anti-Corn Law League of 1838, and the Chartist movement (see Chartism), which flourished in the period from 1838 to 1848. The latter movement supported a democratic People's Charter, which demanded universal male suffrage, equal electoral districts, and other reform measures, and also organized violent demonstrations in Wales in 1839 (see Newport Riots).

Further riots occurred in Wales between 1842 and 1844 (see Rebecca Riots), which resulted in part from general unrest concerning the unpopular Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. However, a number of more positive and liberalizing acts were also passed within Parliament during the same period. These include the Abolition Act of 1833, which provided for slaves in British colonies to be freed; the Representation of the People Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884, which extended voting rights and redistributed parliamentary seats; and the 1846 repeal of the Corn Laws, which was effected by the Tory prime minister Robert Peel and came about partly as a result of the Irish potato famine of 1846 to 1851. The Liberal prime minister William Gladstone also introduced elementary education in 1870 and, between 1880 to 1894, agitated (unsuccessfully) for Irish home rule.
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