

In 1798 a vicar called Thomas Malthus wrote *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. He forecast war, disease and famine if the number of people continued to grow. In fact, in the past there had always been a 'population ceiling' beyond which numbers could not grow. But by 1800 Malthus's ideas were no longer correct, the British population continued growing. It reached 21 million in 1851, and 37 million by 1901.

Nobody knows why the population grew, but historians have made many suggestions. Some of these are listed below.

- 1. Agricultural changes**  
Changes in farming in the 18<sup>th</sup> century helped farmers produce more food - notably milk and vegetables.
- 2. Changes in fashion**  
After 1750 people started to wear cotton, instead of woollen underwear. Cotton was easier to wash.
- 3. Climate changes**  
After 1750 the weather began to get warmer which helped farmers.
- 4. Medical changes**  
In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were improvements in midwifery and the care of pregnant women.
- 5. Vaccination**  
Vaccination was discovered in 1796. People who were vaccinated against smallpox were immune to the disease.
- 6. Behavioural changes**  
After 1700 people married earlier and fewer people stayed unmarried.
- 7. Personal hygiene**  
After 1790 soap was easily available and cheaper.
- 8. Cultural changes**  
At the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a craze for gin drinking. This died out when the government began taxing it in 1751. Gin can damage unborn babies.
- 9. Government action**  
The Public Health Acts in 1848 and 1875 improved housing and public health in towns.
- 10. Environmental changes**  
At the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century many marshes were drained, this killed the mosquitoes so less people got malaria.
- 11. Factories**  
After 1780 more children were employed in the factories. Children were useful because they earned a wage.

## Why did the population grow during the Industrial Revolution?

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### Tasks

The population of Britain increased rapidly in the period between 1750 and 1900. This was due to two factors (a) a growth in the birth rates and (b) a decrease in the death rates.

Answer the questions below. Write your answers in full sentences in your book:

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1. Which of the causes, listed overleaf, would have helped to reduce the death rate? How might they have done this?
  
2. Which of the causes would have helped to increase the birth rate? How might they have done this?