

Learning Activity

This resource provides learning activities for your students using People's Collection Wales. It forms part of a series of three learning resources relating to Swansea in the 1850s.

Victorian Swansea - Counting Heads
Victorian Swansea - People and Possessions
Victorian Swansea - People's Stories

 **Progression Step** **3**

 **Title** **Victorian Swansea - People and Possessions**

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Introduction

What sorts of objects did the people of Swansea have in their houses in the mid-19th century?

When you visit a museum you will see displays of household objects and everyday items that have survived from the 19th century. Some have been handed down through families, some have been found by archaeologists, some have been bought or borrowed, some have been donated to the museum. Some relate to people's work, some to running the household, some to leisure and pastimes.

Objects can tell us a lot about how people lived, how well-off or poor they were and what sorts of materials and manufacturing were available. We can also see what sorts of things were bought and sold, used and treasured, thrown away or lost by people in the past.

This Learning Activity can link with school workshops at the National Waterfront Museum and Swansea Museum.

Learning objectives

Learners will be able to:

- Study changes to people's daily lives in the locality in the nineteenth century
- Identify the ways in which the past is represented / interpreted
- Understand why people did things, what caused specific events and the consequences of those events
- Distinguish between 'fact' and 'opinion' giving some evidence / knowledge based reasons for this

Task 1. People and Possessions - sorting them out

What sorts of objects did people of Swansea have in their houses in the mid-19th century?

Use the 48 object cards of items from the National Waterfront Museum education handling collection, the National Museum of Wales and Swansea Museum collection displayed in the 1851 Census Exhibition.

Each group should have a set of object cards.

1. Look at and think about the objects.
2. In groups decide how you would group the objects. Which ones would you put together in a group and why? Make at least 4 groups of objects based on different selection criteria.
3. Give each group a label. Display the groups with the labels you have chosen. When everyone has finished, walk around and look at how other groups have sorted the objects.
4. Come back together and discuss with the whole class why you have grouped them the way you have. How many labels did the class come up with for the same objects? Which labels and groupings did the class think were the most useful? Do we know what all the items are?

[Object Cards 1-24](#)

[Object cards 25-48](#)

Task 2. People and Possessions - in whose house?

Note: Omit this task if your class is doing the Bringing the Census to Life workshops at the National Waterfront Museum as they will be doing this task in the museum with the real objects. This could be used as a follow-up activity after the visit.

Use the 48 Object cards as for Task 1.

Look at the census entries for some of Swansea's residents [People from the 1851 Swansea census – Excel transcript](#)

Your group will either be looking at all 13 of the Swansea residents and dividing the cards among them OR each group or pair will concentrate on ONE or TWO residents and select the objects you think might have been in their houses.

Your group task is to decide which of the objects are most likely to be found in the houses of which of the residents. You need to think about why you have made these choices.

Think: Could certain objects be found in more than one of the houses?

Could any objects be found in all of the houses?

What evidence do the objects provide of a person's social class, occupation and interests?

Task 3. People and Possessions - Auction Notices

How else can we find out about what people had in their houses?

Think about the furniture you have at home today. In your group make a list of the major items of furniture you have in your house, for example, sofa or couch, coffee table, television, dining table and chairs, etc. Does each group member have similar items in their house?

Now look at some of the Auction Notices printed in *The Cambrian* newspaper in 1849 and the early 1850s. These list household furniture and other items people were selling by auction, usually when they moved away from the area, or were in financial trouble or someone had died.



Auction notice *The Cambrian* 4 November 1853

[Auction Notices](#)

There will be many articles in the Auction lists which you may not know. Use the internet to find out what these items might be. We have created a list of the furniture and household items from the Auction Notices to help you. **Find this at the end of this teaching resource.**

Discuss how different the lists are compared to the list your group made. What are the major differences? Are there any similarities?

Look again at the Auction Notices. What similarities can you see in the household furniture and effects people owned?

Based on the Auction Notices, what kinds of materials are fashionable for household furniture in the 1850s? For example, think about what mattresses/bedding are made from!

What addresses are the Auctions mainly concerned with? Why is this?

Are these advertisements a useful source for understanding the way early Victorian people furnished their houses? What makes these useful? Are they a good source for all people living in Swansea in the 1850s? Why do you think there are no advertisements for Morris Lane or the courts off the High St?

Just for fun! What did fashionable people in the British colonies have in their houses in 1853? Click on the link below and look at these Auction Notices from *The Courier* printed in Hobart Town on Tuesday 30 August 1853. Look at the Notice for Mr Brown's Cottage and the one beneath for Colonel Butterworth of Holbrook Place, in Tasmania (Australia). How similar are the household contents with those in Swansea at the same time?

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/2243757>

Task 4. People and Possessions - Photographs

Can photographs give us some ideas about what people might have had in their houses in the mid-19th century?

Today we would look at photographs to find out what people had in their houses in the recent past. In the 1850s photography was still in its infancy. Photography records images by the action of light and early photographers relied on the sun as their light source, so most photography was done outside. John Dillwyn Llewelyn (1810-1882) who lived at Penllergare near Swansea was an important early photographer. You can see John Dillwyn in the self-portrait with his camera and portable darkroom tent in 1853. Look at his photographs taken around the 1850s and you will see that most shots are taken outside.



John Dillwyn Llewelyn c.1853

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/24286>

Look through John Dillwyn's photographs

<http://www.penllergare.org/victorian-paradise/photography/>

<http://www.swanseamuseum.co.uk/?s=john+dillwyn+llewelyn>

http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/photographer/John_Llewelyn/C/

<http://www.photography-news.com/2011/01/john-dillwyn-llewelyn-early-swanea.html>

Can you find any that help us to learn more about how people lived, worked and what they owned in the mid-19th century?

Are these photographs a useful source for understanding most people's lives in and near Swansea in the 1850s?

Are there any questions you would like to ask John Dillwyn Llewelyn or his family?

Inventory of Victorian furniture and household items, to accompany Task 3.

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT IN YOUR HOUSE?

These items from houses in Swansea were listed in Auction Notices in *The Cambrian* between 1849 and 1854.

Linen
Beds and bedding
Moreen window curtains
Moreen and chintz window hangings
Mahogany and painted French and other bedsteads
Mahogany and painted 4 Poster bedstead
Mahogany French and other bedsteads with Moreen hangings
Bed steps
Best hair mattress
Feather beds, bolsters, pillows, paillase and blankets
Moreen furniture
Wardrobes
Wash-hand Stands
Chamber ware
Bidets
Toilet tables
Mahogany Chests of Drawers
Mahogany Swing Glasses
Painted dressing tables
Bedroom chairs
Rosewood Round Table
Rosewood Card Tables
Rosewood and Mahogany Dining Table
Rosewood and Mahogany Cheffioneers
Occasional Table
Pembroke Table
Chess table
Mahogany Bookcase and Secretary
Work table
Mahogany Loo Table
Mahogany Horsehair-seated Chairs
Dining Room and Drawing Room chairs
Sideboards
Sofas
Couches
Easy Chairs
Pianoforte
Canterbury
Music Stool
8 Day Clock
Venetian and Kidderminster Carpets
Brussels and other carpets
Hearth rugs
Floor Cloths
Rope and Wool mats
Hall Lamp
Hall Table and Chairs

Inventory continued.

Umbrella Stand
Hat Stand
Barometer Glass
Fenders
Fire Irons
Dinner and Dessert services
Stone china dinner service
China Breakfast services
China Tea Set
Chimney glasses
Dressing glasses
Glass
Dinner set of Ware
Bronze Tea Urn
Kitchen Dresser
Kitchen Tables
Clothes Presses
Kitchen Utensils and requisites
Glass and china
Double-bodied Phaeton
Pony Phaeton
Set of harness
Sound horse
Pony

You can discover what these items are by searching on the web. As well as wikipedia another useful site with photographs is

<http://www.antiques-atlas.com/>

Extension Activity: You have an interior design company based in Swansea in the 1850s. A client moving to Cambrian Place has asked you to locate household furniture and other household items for their bedrooms, drawing room, dining room and hall for their approval. You do not need to look at kitchen or other areas. You are to assemble photographs or drawings of furniture and items in the latest fashion for them to select. You may choose for a group to do one room each.